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Review

PAOLO MARRASSINI, *Storia e leggenda dell’Etiopia tardoantica: Le iscrizioni reali aksumite*

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Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA, like the preceding one, is partly monographic, with a section containing the proceedings of the Panel on Islamic Literature in Ethiopia: New Perspectives of Research, from the ‘19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies’, held in Warsaw, Poland, on 24–28 August 2015.

Starting from this issue, the annual bibliography on Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics held from its inception in 1998 for eighteen years by Rainer Voigt is handed over, on Voigt’s own will, to a pool of younger scholars, with the substantial support of the AETHIOPICA editorial team. I would like on this occasion to express the deep gratitude of the editorial board of AETHIOPICA and of all scholars in Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics to Rainer Voigt for his fundamental and valuable contribution.

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.
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).
EI² *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I–XII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2005).
EMML Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
JES *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
JSS *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Manchester 1956ff.
NEASt *Northeast African Studies*, East Lansing, MI 1979ff.
OrChr *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.
*PICES*⁹ A.A. GROMYKO, ed., 1988, *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26–29 August 1986*, I–VI (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Central Department of Oriental Literature, 1988).
RSE *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli 1983ff.
ZDMG *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig–Wiesbaden–Stuttgart 1847ff.

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Finally, we may congratulate the editors, the members of the editorial team, and all the specialists—if my calculations are exact, not less than 591 authors!—who have collaborated on such a remarkable and scholarly achievement, and to express the wish that the content of the 4,360 articles of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* will be soon available online, and that, in future, regular publication of new supplements will help to keep this wonderful project up to date.

Pierluigi Piovanelli, University of Ottawa

PAOLO MARRASSINI, *Storia e leggenda dell’Etiopia tardoantica: Le iscrizioni reali aksumite*, Testi del Vicino Oriente antico, 9, Letterature etiopica, 1 (Brescia: Paideia, 2014). 394 pp. Price: € 43.00. ISBN: 978-88-394-0873-0.

Since the 1990s a series of publications have made the rich and diverse evidence related to late antique Ethiopia ever more accessible to non-specialists. In this remarkable book—published in the excellent *Testi del Vicino Oriente antico* series after the author’s death in 2013—the celebrated Semiticist Paolo Marrassini makes a landmark contribution to this burgeoning literature. In a modest introduction, Marrassini explains that the aim of the volume is to present to the reading public and to non-specialists in related fields reliable, annotated translations of the most important epigraphic evidence related to late antique Ethiopia. These translations are based on the Gəʿəz and Greek inscriptions published in the first and second volumes of the *Recueil des Inscriptions de l’Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite* (Paris, 1991). The translations from Greek follow those in the third volume of the same publication (2000); while those from Gəʿəz (still not translated in the *RIÉ*) are the author’s own.

The provision of translations from the critical texts of these inscriptions—gathered together in a single place, and with a detailed annotation—is important enough; but I call Marrassini’s introduction ‘modest’ because the book in fact goes much further than its stated aim. For it offers (alongside the translations and their commentaries) a series of critical reflections on the inscriptions’ context, and a comprehensive guide to the rich textual evidence through which historians can further comprehend them. Extensive bibliographies on particular topics, persons, or texts appear throughout, in addition to the long bibliography in the final pages (to which Alessandro Bausi has added more recent publications). The book therefore also serves as an important scholarly introduction to the history of late antique Ethiopia, and will be of enormous interest both to Ethiopicists and, in particular, to those (like the present reviewer) who specialise in the wider medieval, eastern Christian, and Islamic worlds.

The book is divided into two parts: the first (in six chapters) narrates the history of Ethiopia in the fourth to seventh centuries; while the second (in three chapters) then sets out the inscriptions in translation, again organised according to the sequence of kings. In a final appendix Rodolfo Fattovich considers the contribution of archaeological evidence to our wider knowledge of the Ethiopian world.

After a first chapter ('Preliminari') dealing with various aspects of context, the book progresses to a series of chapters which relate a narrative of Ethiopian history from the first to seventh centuries, structured around the succession of kings. Chapters 2, 4, and 6 provide a list of known kings in approximate chronological order, setting out in detail the evidence for each (some are known only from inscriptions on coins) and also orienting the reader in the most important scholarship. The most useful and most impressive chapters in this first part are however those which punctuate this narrative, and which focus on the reigns of two conquerors who dominate the inscriptions, and whose exploits are memorialised in wider sources: ʿEzana in the fourth century, and Kaleb in the sixth.

Thus chapter 3 focuses on the former, and in particular on his conversion to the Christian faith (although it contains much else besides, not least a detailed discussion of Ethiopia's pre-Christian pantheon); while chapter 6 discusses Kaleb, and the Ethiopian expeditions to Southern Arabia in and around the famous massacre at Naḡrān (again, however, it contains much more than this, not least an extended treatment of the 'Nine Saints' tradition, and detailed discussion of potential Syrian or Judaising influences on Ethiopian culture). Specialists might find much of the discussion familiar—but where Marrassini's book distinguishes itself is in the remarkable, learned guide which it presents to the extant source material for these episodes. Thus within these chapters Marrassini sets out an exhaustive account of the diverse evidence—in multiple languages (Ethiopic, Syriac, Greek, etc.) and media—as well as the associated scholarship. It is the best introduction I have read to the reigns of these two celebrated kings; non-specialist readers will in particular welcome the detailed presentation of the Ethiopic evidence.

The second part of the book (in three chapters) contains the annotated translations of eighteen regal inscriptions, organised again according to the progression of kings. The first chapter contains the inscriptions which precede ʿEzana; the second those of ʿEzana himself; and the third those of Kaleb and his successors. Each inscription—translated from Greek or from Gəʿəz; and from three different scripts: Greek, Epigraphic South Arabian, and both vocalised and unvocalised Ethiopic—is provided with an extensive bibliography (which includes a guide to existing translations) and an extremely rich historical and linguistic annotation.

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A non-specialist who has attempted to read and understand these inscriptions will at once realise what a precious resource Marrassini has provided. While translations of most of these inscriptions have appeared in various publications, here Marrassini gathers them together in a single place; and while some have sometimes been published as a collection, these collections are either now incomplete¹ or lacking in commentaries to elucidate the contents for non-experts.² Marrassini's book should now therefore be the starting point for all students of the epigraphic evidence, which is so crucial to our understanding of the world which produced them.

In short, this is a wonderful book which will delight specialists and non-specialists alike. It is essential reading.

Phil Booth, Trinity College, Oxford

PAOLA BUZI, *Coptic Manuscripts 7: The Manuscripts of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Part 4: Homiletic and Liturgical Manuscripts from the White Monastery: With two documents from Thebes and two Old-Nubian manuscripts*, *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*, 21, 7 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014). 274 pp. Price: € 68.00. ISBN: 978-3-515-10711-2.

The publication of a new catalogue of Coptic manuscripts is always a reason for celebration, and this is no exception. In the volume under review, Paola Buzi has catalogued Coptic manuscripts belonging to the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, mostly deriving from the so-called White Monastery near modern-day Sohag,¹ but also including other manuscripts kept in the same collection, including two Sahidic documentary papyri from Thebes, fragments of two liturgical parchment manuscripts in Old Nubian, and some manuscripts with less certain provenance (see below). The White Monastery library, from which most of the fragments catalogued here derive, once contained by far the most extensive collection of Coptic manu-

¹ E.g. the translations in E. Littmann, ed., *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition, IV: Sabäische, Griechische und Altabessinische Inschriften* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1913).

² E.g. in S.C. Munro-Hay, *Aksum: An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 221–232.

¹ On the White Monastery and its library, see esp. T. Orlandi, 'The Library of the Monastery of Saint Shenute at Atripe', in A. Egberts, B.P. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet, eds, *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest: Acts from an International Symposium Held in Leiden on 16, 17 and 18 December 1998*, *Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava*, 31 (Leiden–Boston, MA: E.J. Brill, 2002), 211–231.