

## The Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies at Universität Hamburg

cordially invites you to attend a Zoom talk on

### Ethiopian Epigraphy

by

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on

**Wednesday, 23 September 2020, 5.00 pm (GMT +2)**

The Ethiopian and Eritrean region, notwithstanding the small overall numbers of ancient and medieval inscriptions, amounting to some hundreds, offers examples for several case studies and a wide variety of material epigraphic typologies and languages. Inscriptions provides evidence for the early emergence of a state entity based on the Eritrean and northern Ethiopian highlands not far from the Red Sea shores, exactly of the same kind as that attested in Yemen on the highlands of the eastern side of the Red Sea around the eighth/seventh century BCE. These first inscriptions were produced and issued by Semites who used the Sabaic language and script, and whose ethnic and cultural identity is however disputed. They are considered either a genuine offspring of that same Sabaeen civilization as in Yemen, or a more locally characterized civilization established by Semite settlers, who used Sabaic as their written language, but who spoke a language of their own. In the latter case, this civilization would prelude the subsequent Aksumite civilization. The emergence of the kingdom of Aksum (attested since the first century CE) in a strongly Hellenized context is the following landmark in the history of the region. First witnessed by classic literary sources around the second and third century CE, the existence of a kingdom of Aksum – as well as other polities – is also positively attested by local inscriptions in a new language (the earliest form of Gəʿəz, or Ethiopic) and script of its own as well. The latter is a form of South Semitic script similar to that used for North and South Arabian languages, but with the fundamental innovation of the writing direction from left to right, probably out of Greek influence, and with the addition of vowel notation since the fourth century at the latest. The previously pagan kingdom of Aksum became Christian in the fourth century and rapidly evolved into a full-fledged regional Christian civilization depending from the Egyptian non-Chalcedonian Church. The sixth century is marked by the last important involvement of Aksum in South Arabia, after which, with the emergence of Islam, the ideal and material heritage of the late-antique kingdom of Aksum survived only to some extent. What remained of it was eventually (twelfth to thirteenth century) transferred to the so-called Zāgwe kingdom (in the northern 'Amḥarā region, with the capital city of Lālibalā) and finally to the so-called Solomonic kingdom (based in the 'Amḥarā region). (Islamic inscriptions, which are also well represented, are excluded from this short survey, because they belong to a tradition of their own.)

The presentation of a recently published volume with French translation and commentary of all ancient inscriptions in Sabaic and Gəʿəz from Ethiopia and Eritrea, and of ancient Gəʿəz inscriptions also from nearby areas, belong to those events which were cancelled due to the outbreak of the pandemic. The event, titled ‘A landmark in Ethiopian epigraphy: Presentation of the *Recueil des Inscriptions de l’Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite (RIÉ IIIB)*’, was planned for 13 March 2020 at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures within the activities of the Research Field B of the Cluster of Excellence ‘Understanding Written Artefacts: Materiality, Intercation and Transmission in Manuscript Cultures’, with participation of specialists from several fields and countries (Iwona Gajda, George Hatke, Irene Rossi, and Peter Stein).

In the early 1970s, in fact, A. J. Drewes (d. 2007), R. Schneider (d. 2002), and É. Bernand (d. 2013), with F. Anfray, started a cooperation in a project aiming at the publication of a complete corpus of Ethiopian epigraphy. In 1991 they published the first two volumes with texts and plates of all inscriptions known at the time, while a third volume of translation and commentary of the Greek inscriptions edited by Bernand appeared in 2000. The last volume (IIIB), introduced by R. Schneider, authored by A. J. Drewes, and posthumously edited by Manfred Kropp and Harry Stroemer, completes this major enterprise (*Recueil des Inscriptions de l’Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite, Tome III: Traductions et commentaires, B: Les inscriptions sémitiques*). This work constitutes a landmark in the study of Gəʿəz inscriptions and of Sabaic inscriptions of Ethiopia and Eritrea, since it definitely replaces older reference works, and *in primis*, the well-known *DAE IV* volume edited by Enno Littmann in 1913. Moreover, it provides what had never been available so far, that is, a complete translation of all inscriptions known until 1991, with a few updates on inscriptions discovered in the meantime.

Along with this major work, another contribution must be mentioned: this is the comprehensive Italian translation, alongside a commentary, of all royal Aksumite inscriptions, authored by Paolo Marrassini (d. 2013), which appeared posthumously in 2014 (*Storia e leggenda dell’Etiopia tardoantica. Le iscrizioni reali aksumite*). This work provides the largest and most detailed historical introduction to the Aksumite inscriptions available so far, with exhaustive references to ancient and medieval sources.

Yet, besides the interest that epigraphy has in itself, which is obvious for the documentation of the earliest phases of scribal practices in the Horn of Africa, of the emergence of the Gəʿəz language, and for Gəʿəz palaeography, which is the general importance of Ethiopian epigraphy for manuscript studies, particularly in relation to orthography and linguistics? Can Ethiopian epigraphy still reveal some surprisingly unknown data? what can we learn from recent epigraphic discoveries? And are still there problematic cases, which resist our interpretation?

The lecture, which is of introductory character, along with an overview of Ethiopian epigraphy, will deal with some exemplary cases taken from recent discoveries (inscriptions of King Ḥafila and of Beta Samāʿti), and with the much debated inscription of Ham near to Dabra Libānos in Eritrea (*RIÉ* no. 232).

#### **Main reading:**

Bausi, Alessandro 2005. ‘Ancient features of Ancient Ethiopic’, *Aethiopica*, 8 (2005), 149–169 (= Bausi 2005).

Bausi, Alessandro and Pietro Liuzzo 2019. ‘Inscriptions from Ethiopia. Encoding Inscriptions in Beta Maṣāḥəft’, in Annamaria De Santis and Irene Rossi, eds, *Crossing Experiences in Digital Epigraphy. From Practice to Discipline* (Berlin - Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 84–92.

DAE IV = Enno Littmann, *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition, IV: Sabäische, Griechische und Altabessinische Inschriften* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1913).

EAE 2007. 'Inscriptions', in Siegbert Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, III: He–N (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 152a–167b: Alessandra Avanzini, 'Introduction', 152a–153a; Norbert Nebes, 'Epigraphic South Arabian inscriptions in Arabia', 153a–154b; Norbert Nebes, 'Ethiopia in Epigraphic South Arabian inscriptions', 154b–156a; Walter W. Müller, 'Sabaic inscriptions in Ethiopia and Eritrea', 156a–157a; Gianfranco Fiaccadori, 'Greek inscriptions in Ethiopia/Eritrea', 158a–159b; Alessandra Avanzini, 'Gə'əz inscriptions in Ethiopia/Eritrea in antiquity', 159b–162a; Serguei A. Frantsouzoff, 'Gə'əz inscriptions in South Arabia', 162a–163a; Gianfranco Fiaccadori, 'Gə'əz inscriptions in Ethiopia/Eritrea in medieval and modern times', 163a–165a; Alessandro Gori, 'Arabic inscriptions in the Ethiopian region', 165a–167b.

Kropp, Manfred 1999. '»Glücklich, wer vom Weib geboren, dessen Tage doch kurz bemessen, ...!«. Die altäthiopische Grabinschrift von Ḥam, datiert auf den 23. Dezember 873 n. Chr.', *Oriens Christianus*, 83 (1999), 162–175.

Marrassini, Paolo 2014. *Storia e leggenda dell'Etiopia tardoantica. Le iscrizioni reali aksumite con un'appendice di Rodolfo Fattovich su La civiltà aksumita: aspetti archeologici e una nota editoriale di Alessandro Bausi*, ed. Alessandro Bausi, Testi del Vicino Oriente antico, 9, Letteratura etiopica, 1 (Brescia: Paideia, 2014).

RIÉ = Étienne Bernand, Abraham Johannes Drewes, and Roger Schneider, *Recueil des Inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite. Introduction de Fr. Anfray*, I: *Les documents*; II: *Les Planches*; III: *Traductions et commentaires*, A: *Les inscriptions grecques* (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1991–2000); Abraham Johannes Drewes, *Recueil des Inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, Tome III: *Traductions et commentaires*, B: *Les inscriptions sémitiques*, Introduction par Roger Schneider, Texte révisé et adapté par Manfred Kropp, édité par Manfred Kropp et Harry Stroemer, eds Manfred Kropp and Harry Stroemer, *Aethiopistische Forschungen*, 85 / *De Goeje Fund*, 34 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019).

Weninger, Stefan 2016. 'A Hundred Years of Aksumite Epigraphy Since Enno Littmann', in Walter Muluwork Kidanemariam and Wolbert G.C. Smidt, eds, *Regional History and Culture of the Horn: One Hundred Years German Aksum Expedition*, *Ityopis* extra issue, 2 (Mekelle, Tigray, Ethiopia: Mekelle University, 2016), 93–102.

If you are willing to join the Zoom session, please send an email to [aethiopistik@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:aethiopistik@uni-hamburg.de).