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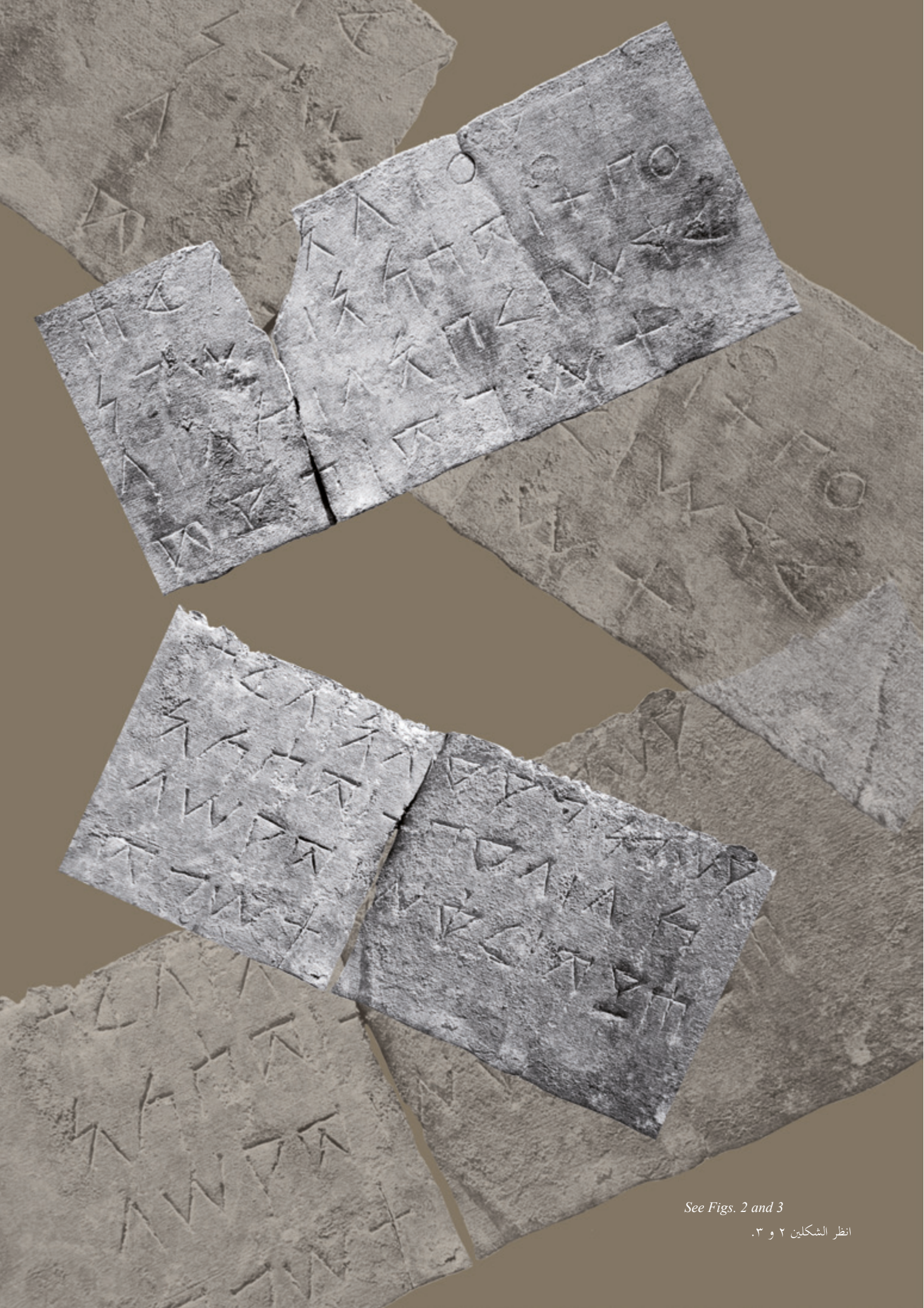
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See Figs. 2 and 3

انظر الشكلين ٢ و ٣.

The Inscriptions of the Aksumite King Ḥafil and their Reference to Ethio-Sabaeen Sources*

Norbert Nebes

Abstract / Kurzfassung / الخلاصة

In two inscriptions in unvocalized Gəʿəz, incised on two bronze plaques, the hitherto unknown Aksumite king ḤFL is mentioned who is probably identified with Aphilas commonly known only from coins at the beginning of the 4th century CE. The philological analysis shows striking parallels to earlier and contemporary inscriptions from Tigray (Ethiopia).

Zwei mit Inschriften in unvokalisiertem Gəʿəz versehene Bronzeplaketten nennen den bisher unbekanntes aksumitischen König ḤFL, der mit hoher Wahrscheinlichkeit mit dem auf Münzen zu Beginn des 4. Jh. n. Chr. genannten König Aphilas identisch ist. Die philologische Analyse zeigt dabei starke Parallelen zu älteren und zeitgleichen Inschriften aus Tigray (Äthiopien) auf.

يذكر نقشان كتابيان محزوزان على لوحتين برونزيتين بالخط الجعزي غير المشكّل الملك الأكسومي ح-ف-ل، الذي بقي مجهولاً إلى الآن ويطلق أغلب الظن الملك أفيلاس المذكور على المسكوكات النقدية في بداية القرن الرابع الميلادي. ويظهر التحليل اللغوي لهما أشباه مدهشة لنقوش كتابية أقدم منهما أو معاصرة لهما من تجراي (أثيوبية).

The altar inscription of Waʿrān

Ethiopia · Tigray · Mäqabər Gaʿəwa · Gəʿəz · King Ḥafil
Äthiopien · Tigray · Mäqabər Gaʿəwa · Gəʿəz · König Ḥafil

Taking into account the altar inscription excavated in Mäqabər Gaʿəwa near Wuqro several years ago,¹ the number of our royal inscriptions has increased considerably. A small sanctuary to ʿAlmaqah has been documented the construction of which was commissioned by King Waʿrān, the son of Rādiʿum, and evidence for which is also given by a short inscription by a Sabaeen mason.²

Compared to the other royal inscriptions dating back to the Ethio-Sabaeen times,³ the text is the most closely related to the Sabaeen originals from the Arabian side of the Bāb al-Mandab. This is not only true of the professional work of the mason, of the outstanding quality of the letters cast in relief, but also of the formula and the language. The text reads as follows:

* The present contribution is an expanded and revised version of my paper held at the 21st Rencontres Sabéennes in Toulouse (June 8–10, 2017), entitled “Evidence for Ethio-Sabaeen History from Aksumite Sources”. I am very grateful to Michael Macdonald, Oxford, and Emily Schalk, Berlin, for their help translating my text to English. Critical notes were supplied by Walter W. Müller (Marburg), Iris Gerlach and Ricardo Eichmann (both Berlin), Anne Multhoff and Mariam Kilargiani (both Jena), for which I express my sincere gratitude.

1 An elaborate report on the excavation and its findings is given by Wolf – Nowotnick 2010; for a detailed study of the libation altar, see Schnelle 2015.

2 Cf. MG 4=DAI ʿAddi ʿAkawəḥ 2008-2, see Nebes 2010a, 226–227.

3 A study of the formula and contents of the Ethio-Sabaeen royal inscriptions is in preparation. A preliminary report was presented at the conference “Ancient South Arabia. Kingdoms, Tribes, and Traders”, held at the beginning of September 2016 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna.

(MG 3=DAI ‘Addi ‘Akawəḥ 2008-1)⁴

Transcription

- A. [Symbol] w^ˈrn / mlkn / šr^ˈn / bn / rd^ˈm / w-š^ˈhtm / r^ˈ{k}
 B. [yt]{n} / hḥds / l-^ˈlmqh / ywm / tb^ˈl / byt / ^ˈlmqh / b-yh^ˈ
 C. b-nhy / ^ˈttr / w-^ˈlmqh / w-dt-ḥmym / w-dt-b^ˈ
 D. dn /

Translation

“(A) Wa^ˈrān, the king who overthrows (the enemy), son of Rādi^ˈum and of Šaḥḥatum, the female companion, (B) built for ^ˈAlmaqah (this new altar)⁵, when the temple of ^ˈAlmaqah in Yiḥa^ˈ had been transferred (to him), (C) on the authority of ^ˈAṭtar and ^ˈAlmaqah and dāt Ḥamyim and dāt Ba^ˈ (D) dān.”

The wording itself is not particularly difficult, yet it has its own pitfalls. Without doubt, the principal difficulty is in the key word *tb^ˈl* on side B, depending on how one understands its meaning. Two possibilities could be taken into consideration, the first of which is attested very late in the stelae of Šuraḥbi^ˈil (455 CE) and ^ˈAbreha (548 CE). There, *tb^ˈl* in C 540/27 designates the preparation of the bedrock, which was the foundation for a construction element of the North Sluice which was erected anew:

Transcription

w-^ˈdb-hw / bn / mwtr-hw / w-tb^ˈl / ^ˈrn / ^ˈd (28) y / ḥšqr-hw

Translation

“and he (sc. Šuraḥbi^ˈil) repaired it (sc. the part of the dam that is called ^ˈAwdān) from its foundation and the bedrock until he completed it.”⁶

The second meaning is attested in many more examples and should be connected with the substantive *ba^ˈl* “lord, owner” from which several verbal derivatives exist.⁷ The verb *ba^ˈala*, which due to the infinitive *b^ˈln* has to be assigned to the second stem, has been translated by the Sabaic Dictionary as “transfer, hand over (property)”,⁸ and this meaning is attested in juridical contexts, such as in F 76/1–2:

Transcription

- (1) nš^ˈkrb / y^ˈmn / yhrḥb / ... / zrb / ... / w-b^ˈln / ... / l-^ˈ
 (2) dm-hw / yh^ˈn / w-bny-hw / ... / kl / ^ˈsdn / w-^ˈntn /

Translation

- (1) “Naša^ˈkarib Yu^ˈmin Yuharḥib ... handed over ... and transferred ... to

- (2) his clients Yuha^ˈin and his sons ... all the men and women ... as property.”⁹

Neither interpretation is devoid of problems.¹⁰ I. Gajda, Y. Gebre Selassie and H. Berhe preferred the meaning “to erect, to construct”,¹¹ which itself is not attested and more or less is derived from *b^ˈl* “work, excavate (bedrock)”.¹² But such a meaning as “excavate bedrock” in the sense of “lay the foundations” can be ruled out for the following reason: The altar in Wuqro represents a miniature model of the Great Temple in Yeha to which our inscription refers explicitly. M. Schnelle’s measurements show that the relationship of the external proportions of length to width and length to height in both constructions is the same (Fig. 1a–b). Since the altar represents a miniature model of the Great Temple in Yeha, it is highly unlikely that it was commissioned by Wa^ˈrān before the Great Temple was completed.

At first sight, the second interpretation is likewise not so obvious. If we take *taba^ˈala* as the passive voice of the second form in the sense of “property to be handed over to someone”, then the entire passage is correctly understood from a grammatical point of view only when *byt / ^ˈlmqh / b-yh^ˈ* is taken as the subject.¹³ Even though it is not explicitly stated, to whom and by whom the temple was handed over, it can be assumed that only Wa^ˈrān is the indirect unsaid object,¹⁴ to whom the Great Temple in Yeha was transferred. Moreover it can be assumed that the deities, named in following, transferred the sanctuary to the king.¹⁵ The question arises as to what is the

4 See Gajda *et al.* 2009, 37–39 and Nebes 2010a, 216–226, for a detailed study.

5 For the meaning of *hḥds*, see Nebes 2010a, 219–222.

6 Cf. also C 540/21 and C 541/102 *tb^ˈl* as well as the verb (*b^ˈl*) in C 541/69. For the meaning, cf. Sab. Dict. 25 s.r. B^ˈL III, and recently Müller 2010, 145 s.r. B^ˈL II.

7 For examples, see Multhoff 2011, 279–280.

8 Sab. Dict. 25 s.r. B^ˈL I.

9 For the text, cf. Nebes 2004, 300–302 fn. 36.

10 A third possibility that bases *tb^ˈl* on Ethiopic *tabā^ˈla* can be rejected right away, as the passive meaning “be celebrated (feast)” (Leslau 1987, 83 s.r. ba^ˈāl III) does not agree syntactically with the following *byt / ^ˈlmqh / b-yh^ˈ*.

11 Gajda *et al.* 2009, 38–39.

12 See Sab. Dict. s.r. B^ˈL III.

13 Nebes (2010a, 216. 222) translates the passage with “when he was appointed lord of the temple of ^ˈAlmaqah in Yāḥa”, which makes sense, but should be corrected because *byt / ^ˈlmqh / b-yh^ˈ* is the grammatical subject and not *w^ˈrn*.

14 Formally not to be rejected, yet less probable is that ^ˈAlmaqah is insinuated as the indirect object in which case a different formulation would be expected; cf. also the details in Nebes 2010a, 222.

15 Grammatically, *b-nhy / ^ˈttr / w-^ˈlmqh / w-dt-ḥmym / w-dt-b^ˈdn* does not function as agent for the passive *tb^ˈl*, which is introduced in Sabaic (and also in Gəṣəz) by *l-* (see below), but basically should be assigned to the main verb *hḥds*.



Fig. 1a Libation altar/Miniature model of the ḤAlmaqah Temple at Mäqabər Ga'əwa (Wuqro); Length – Width: 1.124 – 0.91 m = Ratio: 1.24, Length – Height: 1.125 – 0.695 m, Ratio: 1.62 (DAI Orient Department/P. Wolf).

الشكل a1: مذبح إراقة / نموذج مصغر لمعبد أَلْمَقَه في مقابر جاعوا (وقرو)؛
الطول – العرض: 1,124 – 0,91 م = النسبة: 1,24، الطول – الارتفاع:
1,125 – 0,695 م = النسبة: 1,62 (معهد الآثار الألماني-قسم
المشرق، ب. قُلف).



Fig. 1b Great Temple at Yeha. Comparison of Proportions; Length – Width: 18.80 – 15.50 m = Ratio: 1.24, Length – Height: 18.80 – 11.76 m, Ratio: 1.60 (DAI Orient Department/H. Hitgen).

الشكل b1: المعبد الكبير في يحأ، مقارنة التناسب بين الأبعاد؛ الطول – العرض:
18,80 – 15,50 م = النسبة: 1,24، الطول – الارتفاع:
18,80 – 11,76 م = النسبة: 1,60 (معهد الآثار الألماني-قسم
المشرق، ه. هِتْغِن).



Fig. 2 Bronze plaque with inscription 1 of Ḥafil; not to scale, height of plaque approx. 6–8 cm (taken from Gebreselassie 2017, 37 upper).

الشكل ٢: اللوحة البرونزية الحاملة للنقش الكتابي 1 للملك حَافِل، ليست بالحجم الحقيقي، ارتفاع اللوحة حوالي ٦–٨ سم (مقتبس من أعلى (Gebreselassie 2017, 37).

specific historical and cultic background to this act, designated by *tb^l*, given that thus far it is not attested neither in early nor later sources of the Sabaeans and their South Arabian neighbours.¹⁶

The bronze inscriptions of Ḥafil

However, significant parallels are now found in two inscriptions set up by an Aksumite king some thousand years later, the better understanding of which is enabled by the key word *tb^l* in the altar inscription of Waʿrān. These are two bronze tablets of similar dimensions, the texts of which have been known for some time, but photographs of which have only recently been published with a short translation by Y. Gebreselassie.¹⁷ They are said to have come from the region of Aksum, but details about the finding situation are vague and their present location is unknown.¹⁸ Both inscriptions constitute four-line texts in unvocalized Geʿez scratched on bronze tablets, which we think were originally fixed to similarly shaped objects.¹⁹ The wording in each text is the same except for small but significant differences.

The king who set them up is referred to as *ngʿy / ʿksm*, the king of Aksum, and his name consists of the three consonants ḤFL. This consonantal pattern can be identified with the Greek form Aphilas, an Aksumite king, which so far has been found only on coins.²⁰ If this identification applies, this would point to a date at the beginning of the 4th century CE. It is not necessary to argue that these texts are indeed of great importance for the history of the kingdom of Aksum, especially since this king is the second pre-Christian Aksumite king to be identified from both numismatic and epigraphic evidence.²¹

Inscription 1, without siglum (Fig. 2)

Transcription

1. *ḥfl [ʿ] l / ʿyg*
2. *ngʿ[y] / ʿksm / tb^c*
3. *l / lt / l-ʿbr / ʿsqf*
4. *md{h} / mgʿt*

16 This is a matter of speculation. The question is whether the ritual transfer of the temple in Yeha is a firm component of Ethio-Sabaeen royal practices, for example, as part of the inauguration of the king. Or does it solely represent a one-time act in which the king Waʿrān is given priority over the temple, for example, at the completion of the construction of the sanctuary which must have occurred in the 7th century BC, cf. details in Schnelle 2012, esp. 396–398. However, both assumptions draw from the fact that every form of rulership, cultic dominance, etc. was delegated to the ruler by the gods. This conferral to the ruler by the gods is definitively expressed in RIÉ 1 which states that the Sabaeen deities ʿAstar, Höbas, ʿAlmaqah, dāt Ḥamyim and dāt Baʿdān appointed Waʿrān Ḥaywat king (*ywm / hmlk* (5) *-hmw / ʿstr / w-hbs / w-ʿlmqh* / (6) *w-dt-ḥmym / w-dt-bʿdn*). This conception is not found in South Arabia during the era of the Mukarribs in such clarity. At least, such formulations are not known from royal inscriptions, such as the recorded deeds of Yīṭaʿamar und Karibʿil. Iris Gerlach (pers. comm.) pointed out that this concept of royal authority was not at all foreign to the early Sabaeans. During the period prior to the Mukarribs it must have been even more outstanding and was possibly brought by Sabaeans who migrated to Tigray. That Ethio-Sabaeen kings could have assumed this concept from cultural spheres other than Ancient South Arabia cannot be excluded a priori, yet this has not been confirmed hitherto by archaeological or epigraphical findings.

17 Gebreselassie 2017, 37.

18 Due to linguistic and palaeographic criteria a forgery can be excluded.

19 Pers. comm. Iris Gerlach.

20 See Hahn 2003, 126.

21 Starting from the Greek form and according to the Ethiopic nominal pattern *qatil* (see Tropper 2002, 55–56) an attempt is made to transcribe the name as Ḥafil.



Fig. 3 Bronze plaque with inscription 2 of Ḥafil; not to scale, height of plaque approx. 6–8 cm (taken from Gebreselassie 2017, 37 lower).

الشكل ٣: اللوحة البرونزية الحاملة للنقش الكتابي ٢ للملك Ḥafil؛ ليست بالحجم الحقيقي، ارتفاع اللوحة حوالي ٦–٨ سم (مقتبس من أسفل (Gebreselassie 2017, 37).

Translation

“(To) Ḥafil, ʾElla ʿYG, king of Aksum, to him the MDḤ of royalty was handed over by the elders(?) / the inhabitants(?) of ṢQF.”

Inscription 2, without siglum (Fig. 3)

Transcription

1. ḥfl / ʾl [ʾ] ʿyg / ngśy
2. ʾksm / {t}b ʾl / l-k
3. l-śym / śqf / mdḥ
4. mgśt

Translation

“(To) Ḥafil, ʾElla ʿYG, king of Aksum, to You the MDḤ of royalty was handed over by the (divine) patron of ṢQF.”

Some remarks on the palaeography

The letter ʿ in ʿyg and *tbʿl* (inscription 1/1 and 1/2) is circular, whereas the same letter is rather rectangular in inscriptions 2/1 and 2/2. The letter Ḥ in *mdḥ* (inscription 1/4) is confirmed by *mdḥ* in inscription 2/3. The downstroke of the letter F in *śqf* is not recognisable in the photograph of inscription 2. However, the reading of the letter F is confirmed by *śqf* in inscription 1/3.

Discussion of the text

ḤFL: To the knowledge of the present author, *ḥfl* as a personal name is hitherto attested only in Safaitic.²² In Gəʿəz the root is not attested, while in Epigraphic South Arabic it appears only once in the Qatabānic

clan name *mhflm*.²³ In Arabic it is well represented outside the onomasticon in the meaning “to gather, to collect”.²⁴

ʾL ʿYG: For royal names containing ʾalla/ʾalle, including ʾalle as variant in epigraphic Gəʿəz, see, for example, ʾElla ʿAmida, ʾElla ʿAṣbəḥa or ʾElla Gabaz.²⁵ The root ʿYG in Gəʿəz with verbal and nominal derivatives means “accumulate, gather (intr.), collect (intr.)” or “lake, pond etc.”²⁶ In Qatabānic this root is found in the clan name ʿygn (J 314=CSAI Nr. 572: *hllt / dt / ʿygn*), see also TC 1114=CSAI Nr. 1001. Syntactically, the nominal compounds with ʾalla/ʾalle as found in royal names like ʾl / ʿyg should be interpreted as a status-constructus consisting of a (originally) determinative pronoun, which, because it refers to the king, appears in plural, and of the following rectum. Even though, due to sparse evidence, the structure of the Aksumite royal names is still under discussion, nevertheless examples as in our case indicate that these nominal compounds refer to a clan name rather than an actual name – the explanation until now.²⁷ In the aforementioned case Ḥafil is easily recognisable as the the actual name. Here attention can be drawn to the analogous situation in South Arabia, where foremost in later times compounds of

22 See, for example, LP 259 (Lankester Harding 1971, 195) and AbaNS 1105 (cited from the Online Corpus of North Arabian Inscriptions [DOI: <<http://krc2.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/>>]; last accessed 3 July 2017).

23 J 2511=CSAI Nr. 683.

24 See, for example, Naṣwān Šams 3, 1517a, as well as Lane 603–604.

25 Cf. Bausi 2005a with examples.

26 Cf. Leslau 1987, 79.

27 According to Bausi 2007, 1121.

the form *q-* + clan name (without the preceding personal name) designate the tribal leaders of influential Himyarite clans: cf. *q-mʿfrm* “the (tribal leader) of Maʿāfir”, who is mentioned after the Aksumite kings DTWNS and ZQRNS in al-Miʿsāl 5/10. Further examples: on the ʿAbreha-Stela C 541/84–86, for example, *q-rʿn* “the (tribal leader) of Ruʿayn” and *q-hmdn* “the (tribal leader) of Hamdān”.²⁸

NGŚY ʿKSM: As in RIÉ 180 (see below) the graph shows the form *nagāsi* which forms the regens of the status-constructus and therefore has to be read as *nagāśaya*.²⁹

ʿBR: The proposed translation “elders” is associated with the Ethiopian substantive ʿ*aber*, ʿ*aber*, which Leslau 1997, 5, reads as “old woman, widow, unmarried woman” but also “old man”,³⁰ a rendering that would present meaningful parallels to ʿRG in the inscription of Gadur on the bronze cult rod. A possible connection with *nabara*, meaning “inhabit, dwell”, is just as imaginable,³¹ from which a substantive “inhabitant” in a hitherto unconfirmed, broken plural of the form ʿ*afʿāl* or ʿ*afʿul* with assimilated /n/ would be derived. The assimilation of the /n/ with a following labial is indeed attested in epigraphic Gəʿəz, namely in the same root, as shown by examples in the ʿEzana inscriptions.³² And finally a further but less probable possibility of a connection with the root ʿBR can be ventured, if we assume that an articulatory differentiation of the /ʿ/ and /ʳ/ is not made which is seldom found in epigraphic Geʿez.³³ This ʿ*br* occurs in the formula of the Ethio-Sabaeen Mukarribis, after the preceding Sabaeans, and designates the indigenous population of Diʿamat: for example RIÉ 10: (7A) *ywmy / m* (8A) *lkw / dʿmt / s* (9A) *bʿ-ḥy* (sic lege!) / *w-ʿbr-h* (10A) *y* etc., “when he (sc. the king Lāmān) reigned over Diʿamat, over its Sabaeans and its (indigenous) population” etc.³⁴

ŚQF: Not yet attested name of a tribe, region or site which is vocalised as Śaqaf in the following.

ŚYM: Translated by Y. Gebreselassie in the sense of Ethiopic *śayyum* “governor”.³⁵ Whether or not a deity or a functionary is addressed, depends upon MDḤ, the meaning of which is unknown, and ultimately upon what kind of object is concerned and/or where it was set up. If *śym* means a governor who is installed (*śayyum*) by the king, then the question arises whether it is conceivable that a royal insignia, which most probably is implied by *mdḥ / mgšt*, may be transferred by a governor to the king. Likewise, one would expect the address in second person *l-k*³⁶

directed towards the king less on the part of a governor and more so by a deity.

Here the term *śym* should be linked to Epigraphic South Arabic, attested already in early times.³⁷ Unlike the names ʿ*Aṭtar*, ʿ*Almaqah* etc., Epigraphic South Arabic *śym* is not the name of a deity, but instead an attribute, which is translated provisionally with “(divine) patron or (divine) protector”. Grammatically, it thus functions like a substantive; that is, suffixes can be attached to it.³⁸ It can appear as regens in a construct state (status constructus) combination,³⁹ placed as apposition after a deity,⁴⁰ or used alone as determined substantive *śymn*, whereby in the last case it is often not clear exactly which deity is actually addressed.⁴¹ Particularly the last mentioned use can be found in a prominent example, in the Ethio-Sabaeen royal inscription RIÉ 10 on a large incense burner, which is now preserved in the church ʿAbunā Gārīma near Wuqro. The inscription reads as follows:

Transcription

(1A) [*lmn / mlkn / ś*] (2A) [*rʿn / y*] (3A) *gʿd[y]* (4A) *n / mkrb / dʿmt / w-* (5A) *sbʿ / bn / rbḥ / hq* (6A) *nyw / l-śmn / mqt* (7A) *rn*

Translation

“[Lāmān, the king who overthrows (the enemy), from (the clan) Ya]gʿad, the Mukarrib of Diʿamat and

28 For details, see Gajda 2009, 132–133. 207–208.

29 Cf. Kropp 1994, 136–137 fn. 7.

30 Cf. also ʿ*aber* “old” as an adjective in Tigre, in Littmann – Höfner 1962, 366.

31 Leslau 1987, 383.

32 Compare *ybr* in RIÉ 185/II/15, RIÉ 185bis/II C/13 as opposed to *ynbr* in RIÉ 185/I/14, RIÉ 185bis/I/16 (pers. comm. S. Weninger, Marburg); for more information see also Bausi 2005b, 158.

33 As Littmann 1913, 27, assumes, this is possibly the case with *mlʿ* instead of the expected *mlʿ* (RIÉ 187/17=DAE 9/17).

34 For more details, cf. Nebes 2010a, 230–231 fn. 101.

35 Gebreselassie 2017, 37; see also Leslau 1987, 540; for the functional title in medieval Ethiopia, cf. Nossitsin 2010, 761–762.

36 A reading of *l-kl* in the transition from line 2 to line 3 might be suggested, but this must be rejected simply because a stroke is lacking between the L and the following Ś in line 3.

37 Hence, *śym* is present in Sabaic in the alliance formula of the Mukarribis or as an attribute of ʿ*Aranyadaʿ*, the city god of Naššān in the Ġawf, cf. Nebes 2016, 37–38. 78–79.

38 For example, C 308/2: *śym-hmw / iʿlb / rymn* “their (divine) patron Taʿlab Riyāmim”.

39 For example, YM 11125/9: *śym / nšn* “the (divine) patron of Naššān”.

40 For example, the aforementioned ʿ*rnydʿ* *l[ś]ymn* in AO 31929/1–2, cf. Nebes 2016, 78.

41 Often in minuscule inscriptions, for example, X.BSB 131=Mon. script. sab. 563/2=Stein 2010, 462: *w-śymn / l-ykrbn-kmw* “and may the (divine) patron bless you”, for more details on this, see Stein 2010, 304.

Sabaʿ, the son of Rabāḥ, dedicated the incense burner to the (divine) patron.”

Despite the defective writing of *šmn*, its assignment to *šymn* is clear; the term is attested in early Ethiopia. Thus, the further tradition of this term into the Aksumite era was basically possible,⁴² and for the reasons mentioned above it seems quite probable.

MDḤ: The etymology and meaning are unclear. A root with these radicals is not attested in Gəʿəz. In Tigrinya, Th. L. Kane noted a substantive *mādḥē* with different meanings: “kind of pit into which roasted grain removed from a *moqlo* is put; stone for smoothing parchment”,⁴³ both of which do not come into question for our study. Also a verb *nadḥa*, from which a possible nominal form *maddaḥ* (with the assimilation of the /n/ like in *maggəšt*) can be derived, and which is interpreted as “drive, push, shove, strike, kick, throw down”⁴⁴ does not supply an appropriate meaning for us. W.W. Müller (Marburg, pers. comm.) considers the derivation of MDḤ from the root WDḤ, linking it to the Arabic *ʿawdaḥa*, which according to Lane 2932 among others means “he was submissive, or prompt in obedience, and humble“. Then *m(w)dḥ* would be understandable in the sense of “humbleness or humility (towards the king)“. In this case, however, MDḤ cannot pertain to the object that was handed over; another different translation must be made of *tbʿl*.

MGŠT: Clearly to set as *maggəšt* from *mangəšt*, meaning “kingdom, kingship, majesty, royalty, etc.”,⁴⁵ with the assimilation of the /n/.⁴⁶

It is striking that aside from their parallel structure, both texts display significant differences. The major difference is not in the indirect objects *lt* (*lottu*) line 3 of inscription 1 and *l-k* (*la-ka*) line 2 of inscription 2, in which the king is addressed directly in the second person singular.⁴⁷ The major difference lies far more in the prepositional phrases *l-ʿbr* / *šqf* and *l-šym* / *šqf* respectively, whereby through the parallelismus membrorum the first members in the status-constructus combination, *ʿbr* and *šym*, are a semantic opposing pair, which is tentatively translated as “inhabitants/elders” versus “(divine) patron, protector”.⁴⁸

Regardless of the exact meaning of these phrases, the syntax is quite clear. *tbʿl* followed by *lt* etc. in inscription 1 – and similarly by *l-k* in inscription 2 – can only be understood as a passive voice in the same sense as in the altar inscription of Waʿrān many centuries earlier.

Here *tbʿl* fits in the morphology and semantic of Gəʿəz easily, and is so completely analogous to the Sabaic form that it can be considered as denominative to *baʿāl I* “owner”⁴⁹ and interpreted as T-2 of the *verba mediae gutturalis* in the form *tabaʿala*.⁵⁰

The bronze inscription of Gadur

The similarity of these phrases which are separated by several hundred years is indeed extraordinary. That this is not by chance can be seen from a second Aksumite royal inscription, which also comes from the time before ʿEzana’s conversion to Christianity. Generally known is the inscription of Gadur incised on a cultic bronze rod found among other objects in ʿAddi Gälämo. This Gadur is identified with the Aksumite king GDRT in Sabaeen sources, allied with the Sabaeen king ʿAlḥān Nahfān.⁵¹

(Inscription RIÉ 180)

Transcription

gdr / ngšy / ʿksm / tbʿl / mzlt / l-ʿrg / w-l-lmq

Translation

“(To) Gadur, king of Aksum, the sceptre was handed over by ʿRG/the elders(?) and by (ʿA)LM(a)Q(ah).”

Without going deeper into philological detail, it is obvious that the single sentence in the inscription

42 However, cf. the reservations given in fn. 60.

43 Kane 2000, 503.

44 Leslau 1987, 386.

45 Leslau 1987, 393.

46 Cf. the opposite in the non-assimilated *mangəstomu* in RIÉ 188/6=DAE 10/6.

47 A similar phenomenon is found in the closing clause of the Ethio-Sabaeen royal inscriptions, in which in the apotropaic formula *w-ʿb-k / wdm*, “and thy (divine) father is Waddum”, the ruler is addressed in the second person, cf. Nebes 2010 b.

48 For more on the agent introduced by *l-* in epigraphic Gəʿəz, cf., for example, RIÉ 187/4=DAE 9/4: *maḥram / za-ʿayətmawwā / la-dar* “Maḥrem who is not overthrown by the enemy”. On this form of the negation, see Bausi 2005 b, 158.

49 Leslau 1987, 83.

50 For the paradigm, cf. Tropper 2002, 112. Here, as well as in the following inscription, a rendering of *tabaʿla* in the sense of “be celebrated (feast)” (Leslau 1987, 83 s.r. baʿāl III) does not agree with the syntax and semantics of the individual parts of the sentence, especially when presupposing a homogeneous basic meaning for *tbʿl*. An active meaning in the sense of “à organiser les festivités” (Gebreselassie 2017, 37) is ruled out a priori – it must be in the passive voice. On earlier translations, cf. Nebes 2010 a, 223, fn. 51.

51 With regard to C 308, see the translation and comments by Nebes 2005, 335–338; for the historical situation, see recently Robin 2012, 277–278.

of Gadur contains not only the key word *tb^l* in its proposed passive meaning, but is also construed in analogous syntax. The phrases that identify the agent are introduced by the preposition *l-*⁵² at the end of the clause. Presumably the consonantal pattern LMQ refers to the deity ³Almaqah, a suggestion made by A. Jamme,⁵³ and it is also very likely for another reason.⁵⁴ ³RG is presumably an ethnonym designating the name of a tribe⁵⁵, but, as a possible alternative, it might also be linked to the root ³RG which means “be old”, which would support its translation as “elders”⁵⁶. MZLT can be traced etymologically to Sabaic⁵⁷ and is to be identified with certainty with the word for the bronze cultic rod, which was handed over to Gadur.⁵⁸

The analogy with the bronze plaques of Ḥafil is obvious. Even if we cannot propose a satisfactory translation of MDH in the two inscriptions of Ḥafil, we can deduce from the following word *maggāst*, meaning kingship, that the whole phrase means a symbol of kingship. Given that both plaques share the same dimensions, it seems probable that they were fixed to objects of similar size which played a particular role in Aksumite royal practices.

Overview of the syntactic structure of the phrases

If we reconsider the analogous sentence structures in question, we can discern that in all four inscriptions the core of the phrases constitutes the verb *tb^l* and the following subject. Present in the altar inscription of Wa^ʿrān, the cultic rod of Gadur and both bronze plaques of Ḥafil are the elements:

tb^l + byt ³lmqh b-yh³

tb^l + mzlt

tb^l + mdh mgst

Thereby the basic structure of the Wa^ʿrān inscription is not expanded by further complementary parts of the sentence. The basic structure of the Gadur inscription is expanded by the the agent ³rg and *lmq*, introduced by the preposition *l-*. And in the Ḥafil inscriptions the basic structure is expanded by the agent *l-³br / śqf* and *l-šym / śqf* respectively and additionally by the indirect objects *lt* or *l-k* both of which refer to the fronted element, the name of the king:

tb^l + byt ³lmqh b-yh³

tb^l + mzlt + l-³rg w-l-lmq

tb^l + mdh mgst + l-³br śqf + lt

tb^l + mdh mgst + l-šym śqf + l-k

In addition to these analogous structures, all four inscriptions share a further essential feature: In all four cases the grammatical subject denotes the “material thing” upon which the text is inscribed. In other words, the inscription mentioning the object, conferred on the ruler, is carved on the object itself. The inscription of Gadur is carved on the bronze rod which is mentioned in it. The inscriptions of Ḥafil mention the unknown object which is handed over to

52 On the introduction of the agent by means of *l-*, see fn. 48.

53 Jamme 1957, 80. This proposal was revived by Nebes (2010a, 223 fn. 51) and most recently by Robin (2012, 277). A reading ³lmq without the *-h* or *-hw* is attested in votive inscriptions from Širwāh and Mārib (Schm/Sir 1/4=Schmidt 2007, 298 pl. 18 fig. 1), YM 441/2 and possibly J 708/4), which can be interpreted as abbreviated forms. Further, an inner Ethiopian development is also conceivable. For instance, aside from ³lmqhy (RIÉ 8/2, 10/14) the writing ³lmqy (RIÉ 9/6) is also attested, in which Sima (2003a, 207) suspects a scribal error. Nevertheless, it is more probable that the *-hy* can be seen as third person fem. sg., as, for example, in ³br-hy, ³slm-hy, ³dm-hy etc., and a comparable change from *-hy* to *-y* as in *-hmw* to *-mw* (for example, RIÉ 8/5: *byt-mw* “their house”) can be assumed. That the major deity ³Almaqah reappears after a gap of many centuries in the pre-Christian pantheon of Aksum, albeit in a modified form of the name and likely not identifiable with the coeval ³Almaqah worshipped in the Sabaean realm in South Arabia, is not surprising taking into consideration that the Ethio-Sabaean ³Astar as one of the major deities was invoked in the pre-Christian inscriptions of ³Ezana (cf. evidence in Sima 2003b, 387).

54 For the find situation, see below.

55 As has often been referred to, ³RG (³arəg) is found as a local name in ³Ezana’s campaign against the ³Agwəzat (RIÉ 187/17, 18=DAE 9/17, 18), presumed to have been east of Aksum (cf. Kropp 1994, 139). Taking into account that the temple from which the cultic rod stems is located at ³Addi Gälämo, southeast of Aksum, then a connection with a tribe ³RG inhabiting the area is conceivable.

56 See Leslau 1987, 37. The nominal derivations ³aragāwi, ³aragāy, pl. ³a³rug, also stand for the counsel of the elders, as, for example, in Dillmann 245: “seniores, senatus”. This would present a strong contextual parallel to the Ḥafil inscriptions, in which ³br / ³śqf would correspond to ³rg and ³šym / ³śqf to ³lmq.

57 The *zln* in Alfieri 1/1 (=Jändl 2009, 123–124) derived from the root ZLL means the cast bronze plaque. Jändl (2009, 124) refers to W.W. Müller, according to whom *zalla*, attested in dialects of the Arabian Peninsula, is explained with *sakaba* “to pour, cast”. Thus, there is no doubt that *mzlt* concerns an object cast in bronze, upon which the inscription was incised, and that it was translated provisionally with “scepter”.

58 That the verb before a feminine subject is put in the form 3rd m.sg., as in the case of *tb^l* and *mzlt-t*, is not unusual in Gəʿəz, cf. Tropper 2002, 225.

him. The inscription of Waʿrān is carved on a model of the Great Temple of Yeha, which was transferred to him.⁵⁹

Conclusions

As we have seen, a central term in the early royal cult reappears with the same meaning and in a similar context many centuries later. Authority over the recently completed sanctuary was conferred on the ruler, or symbolic objects of royal authority were handed over to him, by which his legitimacy was publicly demonstrated and acknowledged by his god and his people. If one agrees that this evidence is not accidental, then it has to be conceded that certain topics in the royal cult from early times were not forgotten, but survived throughout the dark ages of the second half of the first millennium BC and reappeared in the Aksumite period. As one would expect, the cultic practices are not the same, but the term by which they were expressed is the same both in the Aksumite period and in Diʿamat. Therefore, one may ask, whether – apart from *tbʿl* – other examples can be found. But here we are treading on very thin ice: We are confronted with the problem that the corpus of Aksumite inscriptions which cover the pre-Christian period is indeed very limited. As far as the royal inscriptions of this pre-Christian period are concerned solely in which these terms are expected we are restricted to three known examples until now and the pre-Christian inscriptions of ʿEzana.

Nevertheless, attention should be drawn to two possible candidates mentioned already in the bronze inscriptions of Gadur and Ḥafil. One is the name of the deity ʿAlmaqah, which presumably survived in the form LMQ in a sanctuary at ʿAddi Gālāmo dedicated to him in Ethio-Sabaeen times (see below). The second example is the term *šym* in the second inscription of Ḥafil line 3, the translation of which with “divine patron” has been preferred instead of “governor” for the reasons discussed above.

These similarities between significant expressions in the royal inscriptions – apparent in the case of *tbʿl* – may lead us to the assumption that the disintegration of the cultural Ethio-Sabaeen landscape after 500 BC may not have been so complete, if such significant words with a specific cultic connotation survived and were reused in the inscriptions by Aksumite kings many centuries later.⁶⁰

At this point, one may ask how and – above all – where these expressions survived into the Aksumite period. A possible answer could be found in some objects discovered in the early 1950s in ʿAddi Gālāmo. Among these objects which stem from one

and the same place, the bronze rod of Gadur was found, together with a statue of a seated female upon a plinth with an early Sabaic inscription (RIÉ 52), a duplicate of which has been found in the ʿAlmaqah Temple in Māqabər Gaʿəwa⁶¹ and together with an inscribed incense burner of an Ethio-Sabaeen king (RIÉ 8).⁶² This king, called Rabāḥ, the father of the well-known Lāmān (RIÉ 5, 10, 61), dedicated the incense burner to ʿAlmaqah, whose sanctuary is also explicitly mentioned (*l-ʿlmaqhy / bʿl / qd[.]r*). Given that all these objects were in one and the same place and – moreover – that it was the sanctuary of the main Sabaeen deity ʿAlmaqah, then it is obvious that this sanctuary was reused by the Aksumite king Gadur. It would also fit that the deity ʿAlmaqah, who can be identified with the form LMQ, is addressed in the king’s inscription on the bronze rod. Thus, it is possible that sanctuaries may have been the prominent reference places, in which cultic and ritual traditions in oral and literary form could have survived throughout the dark ages. Whether the inscriptions from the early times were understood by the later inhabitants and to what extent such cultic traditions were transferred into the Aksumite period – these are questions, the answers to which can only be highly speculative at the moment and depend on more archaeological evidence.

59 This confirms that the Great Temple was dedicated only to ʿAlmaqah. Due to the lack of in-situ inscriptions, this was only presumed, but for good reasons (Nebes 2010a, 223 fn. 57).

60 An adoption of the phrase *tbʿl* with its semantic implications by the indigenous Ethio-Sabaeen cultural sphere and its corresponding morphological inclusion in Aksumite epigraphic Gəʿəz is comprehensible, simply for the reason that the expression in this special connotation is foreign to Sabaic and other Epigraphic South Arabic dialects. In contrast, the term *šym* is somewhat different. Namely, here a coeval adoption from the South Arabian area cannot be excluded. Between the years 190 and 275 CE, Aksum and its Arabian allies were present in Yemen Tihama, from where they were massively involved in South Arabian power plays. Therefore, a precise knowledge on the part of the Aksumites about the religious-political situation of the Sabaeans and especially the northern highland tribes can be presupposed, who worshipped “their (divine) patron” (*šym-hmw*), the Taʿlab of Riyām (C 308/2).

61 Cf. MG 2=DAI ʿAddi ʿAkawəḥ 2008-3=Nebes 2010a, 227–228.

62 Photographs of the objects named were made by Doresse (1960, 420. 422. 423). A summarising description of the situation of the findings is provided by Kropp (1994, 131).

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Sigla of the inscriptions

The sigla of the Sabaic inscriptions are quoted according to Stein (2003, 274–290).

Abbreviations

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|----------|---|-------------|---|
| CSAI | A. Avanzini, <i>Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions I–III, Qatabanic, Marginal Qatabanic, Awsanite Inscriptions</i> , Università di Pisa, <i>Arabica Antica</i> 2, 2004 | Sab. Dict. | A.F.L. Beeston – M. A. Ghul – W. W. Müller – J. Ryckmans, <i>Sabaic Dictionary (English–French–Arabic)</i> , Publication of the University of Sanaa, YAR (Louvain-la-Neuve/Beyrouth 1982) |
| DAI | Deutsches Archäologisches Institut | MG | Māqabər Gaʿəwa |
| Dillmann | A. Dillmann, <i>Lexicon linguae Aethiopicæ cum indice Latino</i> , Lipsiae 1865 (reprint, Osnabrück 1970) | Našwān Šams | K. Šams al-ʿulūm li-Našwān b. Saʿīd al-Ḥimyarī, ed. Ḥ. b. ʿA. al-ʿAmrī, M. b. ʿA. al-ʿIryānī, M. ʿAbdallāh, Bd. 1–12 (Damascus 1420/1999) |
| Lane | E. W. Lane, <i>An Arabic-English Lexicon</i> , Book I, Part 1–8 (London 1863–93) | | |
| RIÉ | E. Bernand – A.J. Drewes – R. Schneider, <i>Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite</i> , Vol. 1: Les documents, Vol. 2: Les planches (Paris 1991) | | |

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المحتوى

بلاد الرافدين ومواضيع إقليمية شاملة

بيتر بفلتسنر - حسن أ. قاسم

10 الموسمان الأول والثاني للتنقيبات الألمانية-الكردية في باسطني عامي ٢٠١٥ و ٢٠١٦

بيتر بفلتسنر - حسن أ. قاسم - باولا سكُنسو - إيفانا بُولِيَتز

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أثمار عبد الإله فاضل - إنريك خَمْنيز

158 كسر ألواح طينية أدبية من أوروك (الوركاء). الجزء الأول: الألواح W 25366

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174 بخصوص الفسيفساء من بناء «رَمْمَشِن» (البن المقسوم طوليًا) في أوروك (الوركاء)

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كُرْسْتينا بُغايْفَر، بالتعاون مع ي. شونِكِه - إ. روبن - س. رايشْمُت - ك. فورسْتَر - ل. كُليش - إ. بيتي

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