



Rencontres Sabéennes 19th, Pisa, 18-20 June 2015



Digitization of the pre-Islamic inscriptions from northern Ethiopia (Tigray region) and southern Eritrea

Giulia Buono
University of Pisa
giuliabuono@live.it

Background



Fig. 1 Temple of Yeha.

In 2011 Prof. A. Avanzini of the University of Pisa initiated the ERC project DASI-Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions, with the main objective of cataloguing and making available online the entire epigraphic documentation from the Arabian Peninsula in pre-Islamic times.

The Corpus of Early Sabaic Inscriptions from Ethiopia in DASI collects the Early Sabaic texts found in an area extending on the North of Ethiopia and the South of Eritrea. The first inscriptions catalogued were those edited in the *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pre-aksumite et aksumite* (Bernard et al. 1991), which gathered all the texts unearthed until 1991, but new texts are being constantly added thanks to the new discoveries of the German and French archaeological missions that are currently working in that area.

The Corpus of Early Sabaic Inscriptions from Ethiopia

The Corpus includes at the moment about 100 texts which are the testimony of the Sabaeen expansion occurred in the first half of the I millennium BC in this area, where the Kingdom of D'mt and Saba' was established.

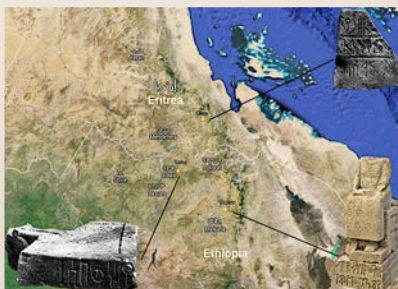


Fig. 2 Map of the territory interested by the Sabaeen expansion.

The epigraphs are recorded on various objects of different materials such as altars, incense-burners, bases of statue or simple stone blocks. Graffiti (60 ca.) are limited to the South of Eritrea.



Fig. 3 Altar from Wukro with dedicatory inscription (MG 3).



Fig. 4 Incense burner from Gobochele (RIE 31).



Fig. 5 Bronze bowl from Guldām, near Yeha (HG Fārās May 2010).



Fig. 6 Stone inscription from Gobochele (RIE 23)

Most part of the texts are dedicatory inscriptions. Often shorts, they only record the name of the dedicant and of the deity. However, there are also more elaborated documents, which provide us with social information, like royal inscriptions. Besides having names unattested in the South Arabian onomastics, the rulers identify themselves not only by the patronymic, but also by the matronymic. They refer to themselves using the verb in the form of *pluralis maiestatis* and the title of *mlkn šr'n* "the victorious kings", still preserving the typical South Arabian title of *mkrb*. The mention of the matronymic after the patronymic and the repetition of *bn* in the onomastic formula to introduce both of them are new in the Sabaic documentation. This phenomenon seems to be important to emphasize the lineage.



Fig. 7 Slab from Amda Tsayon (RIE 1).

RIE 1

- 1 W'rn Hywt, the victorious king (*mlkn šr'n*), descendant of (*bn bn*)
- 2 S'imm Ftrn and S'm'm, the wife (*rtn*).
- 3 daughter of Šbhn, restored (*hids'w*) the temple
- 4 of Hbs', Lord of 'dt, when They made him
- 5 the king: 's'tr and Hbs' and 'lmqh
- 6 and dt-Hmym and dt-B'dn and
- 7 your father Wdm.

RIE 8

- 1 [... Rb]h, the victorious king of Yg'd, mukarrib of D'mt
- 2 and Saba', descendant of W'rn Rydn [dedicated ...] to 'lmqhy Lord of Qd[']r
- 3 when restored [... Rb]h became king of D'mt,
- 4 its east and its west [... his life and his descendants
- 5 and the life of his wives [... and his house and his fields
- 6 [...]

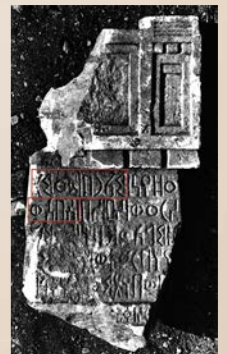


Fig. 8 Incense burner from Addi Gelemo (RIE 8).

From a linguistic point of view, this documentation presents some peculiar features, diverging from the canonical Early Sabaic, probably due to the local linguistic substratum. Despite some inconsistencies, the presence of Sabaeen people in this territory remains certainly an undeniable fact. The South Arabian culture appears in many aspects of the pre-Aksumite society, first of all in writing and language, but also as regards religion, with the worship of the South Arabian deities, and architecture, with great buildings reminding of those of the Sabaeen cities.

References

- Bernard, Etienne and Drewes, Abraham J. 1991. *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pre-aksumite et aksumite*. Introduction de Francis Anfray. Paris: de Boccard. [Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres]
- Gajda, Iwona, Selassie, Yohannes Gebre and Berhe, Hiluf 2009. Pre-Aksumite Inscriptions from Mäqabär Ga'awa (Tigray, Ethiopia). *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 24: 33-48.
- Berhe, Hiluf 2009. Preliminary report on the archaeological excavation of Mäqabär Ga'awa at Addi Akaweh (Tigray, Ethiopia). *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 24: 15-23.
- Nebes, Norbert 2010. Die Inschriften aus dem 'Almaqah-Tempel in 'Addi 'Akaweh (Tigray). *Zeitschrift für Orientarchäologie*, 3: 214-237.
- Nebes, Norbert 2011. An Inscription in Ancient Sabaic on a Bronze Kettle from Fārās May, Tigray. *ITYOPIS*, 1: 159-166.
- Gerlach, Iris 2013. Cultural Contacts between South Arabia and Tigray (Ethiopia) during the Early 1st Millennium BC. Results of the Ethiopian-German cooperation Project in Yeha. *Zeitschrift für Orientarchäologie*, 6: 254-277.
- www.dainst.org/projekt/

Acknowledgements

Project director
Prof. Alessandra Avanzini, University of Pisa

Scientific coordinator
Alessia Prioretta, University of Pisa

Content designer
Irene Rossi, University of Pisa



For more information <http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/>

