

The Foreign Contacts of Ancient Aksum: New finds and some random thoughts

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A review of the archaeological evidence for cultural influences and imports/exports chiefly between Ethiopia and the Nile Valley. Considerable fieldwork in both regions and elsewhere over the past two decades has revealed new evidence and allowed amplification or revision of old interpretations of known material and their importance for the relationship between the two civilizations. Some material relating to other directions also is discussed.

My first encounter with Steffen was as a lowly graduate student, at the 7th Meroitic Conference in 1992 in Gosen (Berlin) that he had organised so well despite 'the wall' and its aftermath. Even then I had already long admired his publication of the 1978 Brooklyn exhibition 'Africa in Antiquity,' one of my earliest encounters with Nubia. We have since corresponded and 'bumped into' each other at conferences and in the field on numerous occasions in various locations. We share an art historical background and mutual interest in both Nubian and Ethiopian archaeology, their cultural relationships and material remains, their interaction with the Classical world, and the historical development of archaeological research in both regions. At approximately the same time, we both expanded from Nubian to Ethiopian fieldwork, he in Eritrea and I at Aksum in Ethiopia, and have since continued both research parameters when our respective fieldwork projects finished. In his honour, I discuss here some new cross-cultural material and review some known material evidence for Aksum's external relations, focusing in part on those with Nubia but also in other directions.

Our earliest written record for the existence of Aksum is found in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, the mid 1st c. AD mercantile handbook that includes 'the metropolis of the Axomites.' The *Periplus* goes on to comment that 'into it is brought all the ivory from beyond the Nile through what is called Kyeneion, and from there down to Adulis' on the Red Sea coast.¹ Appropriately enough, we are introduced to

the city by means of the goods in which it traded and the route from west to east by which they came.

Further external texts continue to mention Aksum for another six centuries, virtually all with an eye towards the raw materials by which it was known and the supreme commercial position it held as controller of both sides of the Red Sea and therefore all the exotic and expensive luxury goods that funneled between the East and the West. Inland contact too was recorded, albeit sporadically, and it is clear that major land routes existed from many directions that marked Aksum as a fixed point on the journey. The 6th c. AD Byzantine writer Procopius of Caesarea noted it was then a journey of 30 days from Aksum to Aswan for an 'unencumbered' traveller, and this and other texts tell us it was no more than between 8 and 15 days travel to Aksum from Adulis.² All these journeys from the Red Sea coast would have passed through the region surveyed and investigated in Eritrea by Steffen in the mid 1990s, and some of the locations mentioned there were documented within his project. These were not wondrous tales of exotic travel but sober accounts of journeys that were relatively well-known. As has been long recognised, such routes would have been utilised for centuries, if not millennia, for journeys both military and commercial. That they are hard to document archaeologically can be illustrated by the types of goods recorded in the *Periplus*: all are raw goods, can be melted down, or do not survive in local context conditions.³

1 Casson 1989, 52-53 (§4.2.8-10), 106-108. He questions the identifications of both the 'Nile' of the *Periplus* with the modern river, and of Kyeneion with the region around Sennar on the Blue Nile south of Khartoum, and suggests the former is the Tekkeze or Mareb river and the latter Walkeit in Ethiopia or Cohain in Eritrea, west or north of Aksum. Note that the text, as translated, does not actually state Kyeneion is 'beyond the Nile,' but rather the ivory

comes 'from beyond the Nile through Kyeneion.'

2 See Dewing 1914, 182-185 (I, XIX, 22, 27); Casson 1989, 53; Wilson 1994, 28 (2b). Raunig (2004) adds modern confirmation for these timings. Pliny (*Naturalis historia* 6, 189) noted a journey from Napata to the Red Sea, a physically easier route, took only three days; see Eide et al. 1998, 858-859 No. 198.

3 Casson 1989, 52-55 [§6.2.23-3.4], 110-114.

The self-laudatory inscriptions of the Askumite kings tell us they fought virtually all their neighbours at one time or another. The long-held interpretation that Ezana may have dealt the ‘final death-blow’ to the fading Meroitic state to his west by the mid 4th c. AD has now been convincingly questioned, even rejected, on both archaeological and inscriptional grounds.⁴ In Ethiopia, two standing stone monuments are decorated with a single ankh (‘life’) hieroglyph on one side edge. One of the rough stelae at Aksum (presumably erected as a grave marker) is roughly incised, whilst a second has very recently been ‘discovered’ on an Aksumite pillar now reused in a modern church in a monastic compound of clear antiquity at Parakleitos near the Eritrean border.⁵ Whilst the Aksum ankh need not necessarily be contemporary with the stela, the Parakleitos glyph, large and in high raised relief, undoubtedly is contemporary and integral to the original intended use of the pillar. The image is ubiquitous in Egypt, Nubia, and elsewhere, but otherwise unknown in Ethiopia.

Aksumite material westwards has been reported as far as Kawa in Nubia where a long graffito text carved on the wall of Temple T was published as unvoiced Ge‘ez. Another two also seen as Ethiopic are published at Meroë, on Pyr. Beg. N. 2 (= Lepsius’ ‘Pyr. A.19’) and now also (possibly) in Chapel M. 292. All are difficult to read due to both weathering and orthography, but seen as perhaps inscribed at the very least by people who knew, however inexpertly, Ethiopic script.⁶ There are however and as has long

been recognised, major problems in transliterating, much less translating, all three graffiti. Alessandro Bausi considers only the Beg. N.2 graffito to include any Ge‘ez but “of very uncertain reading and interpretation.” He “can hardly see any CERTAIN (his emphasis) Ethiopic letter in both the Kawa and Chapel M. 292 inscriptions.” Of the latter, although he is “not an expert in Meroitic, but as far as [he] can see, [he] would incline to think that the central lines of the stone at least are written in Meroitic: there are several groups of separated vertical lines (e.g., letter *y* in Meroitic) that cannot be explained in Ethiopic or even Saba’an terms; other signs (e.g., Meroitic letter *n*) could also be easily identified. There remains the possibility that letters in the right lower part or upper left part of the stone might be Ethiopic/Saba’an, but they are so hardly readable that they could be anything, and [he does] not find reasonable any attempt at a possible reading.”⁷ None appear to be vocalised, suggestively therefore not later than the (first half of ?) the 4th c. AD, whether Meroitic or Ethiopic. A vocalised Ge‘ez graffito found in the 1930s in a cave along the ‘Berenike Road,’ dated to the mid 4th-5th c. AD, likely was carved by a suggestively Christian Aksumite traveller having better abilities.⁸ Two Greek inscriptions referring to Aksum and a bronze Aksumite coin not earlier than c. 400 AD in date also have been recovered at Meroë, the last at least post-dating the city’s 4th c. ‘collapse’ (however this is interpreted), and a non-monetary society even in its heyday. It is the only Aksumite coin recovered in Nubia, but other coins of this very common type also have been found at Qaw and Hawara in Egypt, at the Nilotic end of the ‘Berenike Road.’⁹ A multitude of Aksumite coins and more recently also ceramics have been recovered throughout the Red Sea trading network northwards into the Mediterranean koine and as far east as India, with imports to Aksum from possibly even farther

4 E.g., Török 1999; Edwards 2004, 183-185, 211.

5 Henze 2011, 274, Fig. 8. For the Aksum stela (ST 75), see Phillips 1997, 453 Fig. 6; Phillips 1995, 8. The stelae themselves are entirely unrelated to those in the ancient Egyptian world; see Phillips 1994.

6 Laming Macadam 1949, 117-118 No. 107, Pl. 58, 107; Wenig 2007, 360 Fig.; Munro-Hay 1990, 224; Török 1997, I, 151, 292-3; II, Pl. 114; 1999, 143 n. 89; see also Littmann 1913, 50; Zach 2007.

Littmann and Munro-Hay both say the Beg. N. 2 graffito apparently names for us a ‘son of Julius,’ not an Aksumite name unless it has been romanised by the writer himself. If correctly translated, a problem in itself, this might imply a certain facility in the *lingua franca* Greek (or perhaps even Latin) and an inexpert facility in Ge‘ez script, and thus more likely a commercial(?) traveler than a soldier. Rabin (in Laming Macadam 1949 I, 118) notes this part of the text is illegible, but it may have been more recognisable in 1844 when recorded by Lepsius. Munro-Hay (1990, 24) notes that vocalisation was introduced under Ezana sometime before c. 350 AD (i.e., his conversion to Christianity) although the process began slightly earlier, suggesting a general *terminus ante quem* of early 4th c. AD for these inscriptions. Zach (2007, 939) considers both the Kawa and Beg. N.2 graffiti to be of 4th c. AD date. Note that Gragg (2008, 214-215) incorrectly distinguished Ezana before and after his conversion to Christianity as two separate monarchs,

the second of which he dates to the late 5th c. AD.

7 Pers. comm. (October 2013). My sincere thanks to Prof. Bausi for his time and comments on these graffiti.

8 Littmann and Meredith 1954; see also Bernard et al. 1991, 357-358 No. 268.

9 Inscriptions: One with unrecorded findspot and the other near Temple M. 282; see now Munro-Hay 1990, 224; Eide et al. 1998, 1066-1072 No. 285-286; Welsby and Anderson 2004, 172 No. 155 for new translations; also Bernard et al. 1991, 356 No. 267. Coins: Shinnie 1978, 261, Fig. 34; Shinnie’s comments to Chittick 1982, 55; Shinnie and Bradley 1980, 185, Fig. 76.1295; Munro-Hay 1984, 87 type Anon. AE.1; Munro-Hay and Juel-Jensen 1995, 141-146, type 52 (for dating see 49, 75); recovered by Shinnie in 1975/76. Munro-Hay (1990, 184) cites the Egyptian finds, also listed in Munro-Hay and Juel-Jensen 1995.

east.¹⁰ They indicate the extent of the trading network as outlined in the *Periplus* continued to operate for centuries, and most of this material is long- and well-known to scholars. Evidence for external contact always has been heavily dependent on foreign written sources and monumental Aksumite inscriptions. Our outlook for the most part has been heavily biased by the viewpoints of contemporary onlookers and royal propaganda, as physical evidence for contact has been limited, particularly from the west and south.¹¹ What new evidence for foreign contact at Aksum itself has appeared over the past two decades or so? I shall concentrate here on some new evidence and observations on known material, focusing westward but also looking in other directions. Only one inscription, the not-yet-translated Chapel M. 292 graffito, is 'new' but unlikely to significantly amplify already known written sources, although new translations and compilations of the others have appeared.¹² The archaeological evidence, however, serves to illuminate aspects of foreign contact, some already interpreted through these written sources but not or little attested in the archaeological record. Recent fieldwork at the port of Berenike on the Red Sea coast of Egypt, for example, has underlined its connections by revealing for the first time a number of Aksumite ceramics in contexts possibly as early as the mid 2nd but mainly mid 4th-early 6th c. AD beyond the Aksumite region. Decorated finer ware open bowls were recovered in the one early context cited, but the lids and 'sooted' cooking pots of the main date range are suggestive as much of ships' equipment as items for import/export.¹³ Other finds from this site include a coin of King Aphilas (early

4th c. AD) and a garbled probably Ethiopic *ostrakon* in a late 4th-early 5th c. AD context that might be considered a second 'new' inscription.¹⁴

Aksum as a populated entity existed long before the mid 1st c. AD when it was first recorded in the *Periplus*.¹⁵ Recent excavations have revealed, for the first time, substantial 'Pre-Aksumite' period habitation at Aksum at the British Institute in Eastern Africa's 'D Site' of Kidane Mehret, possibly as early as the 8th c. BC through carbon-dating at its lowest (basement?) levels.¹⁶ The multiple storage pots recovered in a compact space (a storeroom?) at the lowest levels include one restored to nearly 90 cm tall, and the built walls of surrounding structures already are substantial. It has long been accepted that the Pre-Aksumite political entity known to us as *D'MT*¹⁷ centred at Yeha nearby was heavily influenced, at least at its élite level, by the Saba'an civilisation across the Red Sea, but the extent to which this influence was direct is becoming minimised. To my mind, this influence — although not the means — is best paralleled by that of Egypt over the Napatan civilisation that rose at about the same time in the Middle Nile valley, although in this case not underlined by previous occupational control as in Nubia. Recently excavated non-élite habitation areas at Aksum such as 'D Site' have produced little evidence for such trade, with no ashlar masonry, inscriptions or sculptures that are the clearest material evidence for Saba'an influence at this time, suggesting such influence was mostly confined to 'royal' and 'ceremonial' sites such as Yeha and Hawalti; this observation is recognised elsewhere.¹⁸ The Yemeni-type 'torpedo-shaped' jars found at Yeha, Matara and Aksum actually are indigenous variations of the Saba'an type.¹⁹ A few locally made

10 Phillipson 1998, 69, Fig. 26; see now also Tomber 2005a. An 8th c. AD Chinese document records a visit to what have plausibly been identified as the Abyssinian highlands and Nubian lowlands; see Smidt 2001, with further references.

11 See Phillips 1995.

12 Found by Garstang in the 1912-13 season, the present location of the M. 292 block is unknown. Török has now published a photograph and notes it is written in 'Old Abyssinian or Sabaean (?)' but not whether the text is vocalised or unvocalised, a point of chronological significance if his identification of the script is correct; see n. 6 above. New translations of known texts include Munro-Hay 1990, 221-232; Bernand et al. 1991-1993, passim, 2000, passim; Burstein 1998, passim; Eide et al. 1998, passim.

13 Tomber 2007; 2012, 204. Others have been identified at the port of Quseir; see Tomber 2005b. Possible use of the lids and cooking pots may be likened to Aegypto-Roman cooking or baking vessels recovered in late 5th c. AD contexts on Zanzibar, at least one of which also showed evidence for cooking use; see Juma 1996; Phillips 1997, 451.

14 Sidebotham and Wendrich 1996, 16-17, 17, Fig. lower right; Gragg 2005; Sidebotham 2007, 209-210 No. 114 Pl. 8-14 (= Munro-Hay and Juel-Jensen 1995, 95-96, Type 13).

15 Casson 1989, 6-7.

16 Phillipson 2000, II, 504-506; Fattovich and Bard 2001, 17-19 for the Proto-Aksumite period.

17 The appropriateness of the names for both the entity and the period have been queried, but are used here for lack of better alternatives. See Schmidt and Curtis 2008, 17 n. 5; Phillipson 2009, 260, 266.

18 Phillips 2004; D'Andrea et al. 2008, 170. See, however, Gerlach 2013, who sees at least some Saba'an emigrés to the region.

19 The Yeha 'torpedo-shaped' jars are discussed by Porter (2004), who concludes a local origin based on petrographic analysis. The 'torpedo-shaped' jar from Aksum (Phillips 2004, 83, Fig. 29), whilst generally related, deviates sufficiently from the standard form to be excluded from Porter's (2004, 264) study, suggesting it is a step further removed from foreign influence than the others. See now also Porter 2010 for new examples from Meqaber Ga'ewa.

sherds have rocker or fingernail impressed decoration²⁰ that suggests a source of influence farther west or possibly south, perhaps towards Nubia, although again contemporary parallels from these regions seem rather generalised. More specific, and specifically Nubian, is an élite if not royal travertine alabastron of either Egyptian or, more likely, Napatan origin recovered in a Pre-Aksumite tomb at Yeha in the 1960s, suggested by Fattovich as possibly the earliest royal tomb in Ethiopia.²¹ Whilst few actual imports are known between *D'MT* and Nubia in this period, and no relevant texts survive, these at least provide some evidence for contact. One probable cause is an increase in indigenous centralised control of east-west overland trade that benefitted both civilisations who had risen from obscurity at approximately the same time, Napata and *D'MT*. None the less, it must also be noted that the Napatan influences observed at *D'MT* sites are general in nature, although some features such as BTRW ceramics and ashlar masonry are common to both. The exception is the ceramics from the Gash Delta region of eastern Sudan surveyed by Fattovich, some of which have clear resonance if not comparison with others recovered at Aksum and elsewhere.²²

Rodolfo Fattovich and Kathryn Bard's excavations atop Bieta Giyorgis hill at Aksum have revealed, again for the first time, substantial élite residential (ON) and cemetery (OAZ) locations with Proto-Aksumite (c. 400-150 BC) and Early Aksumite (c. 150 BC-AD 200) remains, which are represented in the BIEA excavations only as residual material in later levels.²³ They have identified several objects as related to Napatan and early Meroitic types in relevant levels, including some unillustrated but 'distinctive' potsherds comparable to examples at Soba and Jebel Moya south of Khartoum, and bronze

and iron weapons of 'Nubian type'.²⁴ Manzo²⁵ also has noted imports of glass and ceramic adaptation of Mediterranean metalwork and glassware details at Bieta Giyorgis, a practice recognisably continuing into later periods. Small identifiable Egyptian/Nubian artifacts have been recovered at sites elsewhere, most notably at the Hawalti ceremonial site in a deposit of wide-ranging date including Aksumite material, and also at Aksum, Matara and Adulis. The most important is a small 'cippus of Horus' with a particularly interesting modern history but no recorded context.²⁶ If a latent understanding of its perceived efficacy had been directly passed down through the ages to the 18th c., an ideological transfer in Aksumite times might be postulated, but the 18th c. priests may have added these efficacious properties only after it was found by the Emperor himself.²⁷

Two decorated bronze bowls were recovered in the temple 'hoard' at Addi Gelamo, acknowledged as dating not earlier than the 3rd c. AD but containing material as early as the mid 1st mill. BC. They differ considerably in presentation and have two distinctly different associations with Nubia.²⁸ The better preserved bowl has an incised design incorporating a row of frogs just below the exterior rim and lotus blossoms and buds around the body rising from the bottom, and has long been recognised as an import from Nubia. The design is best paralleled by Meroitic bowls recovered in Tum. VI at the possibly royal cemetery of El-Hobagi near Meroë. The tomb dates to the 4th-5th c. AD, whilst the vessels themselves probably are c. 1st-3rd c. AD with parallels such as a 1st-2nd c. AD faience example at Meroë. Thus they are heirlooms in 'their context',²⁹ as may also be the Addi Gelamo bowl. The other, fragmentary bowl with parading bulls is strongly comparable to

20 Phillips 2004, 82, Fig. 27.

21 Anfray 1973, 43, Fig. left; Fattovich 1990, 25; Phillips 1995, 9.

22 Bard et al. 2001, 33-35, 34, Fig. 3; Brandt et al. 2008, 42-45. Some illustrated sherd types also continue into the Late Aksumite period, e.g., Phillips 2000, II, 324, Fig. 280a, 397, Fig. 345d.

23 Fattovich and Bard (2001, 17-19, 21) noted Proto-Aksumite remains so far had been recovered only at Aksum and its immediate surroundings, but since then Fattovich (2010, 87, 89, 94) has slightly modified his earlier 'period' dating, now cited in the main text above, and recorded further material near Yeha. Presumably, therefore, 'Proto-Aksumite' should not yet be considered a 'period' per se and contemporary remains at sites elsewhere presumably would continue to be recognised as being within the Pre-Aksumite tradition. The *Periplus* was compiled during the latter part of this period. Comparative chronology charts are Fattovich 2010, 87f.; Phillipson 2012, 72, Fig. 20.

24 Bard et al. 2001, 35-37; Manzo 2005, 56-57 for incised vessels, citing Derek Welsby (pers. comm.) and Addison 1949, I, 207f. (see Fig. 109).

25 Manzo 2005, 54-56, Figs. 9-10.

26 Phillips 1995, 5-8 passim, with further references; see also Phillips 1996. Phillipson (2012, 31-32) provides the date of the Hawalti deposit.

27 Phillips 1996, 36.

28 Caquot and Drewes 1955, 41, Pl. V, lower centre. The two others also recovered are undecorated.

29 Dorese 1960, 427-432, Figs. 13-14; Anfray 1990, 63, Fig.; for the El-Hobagi bowls, see Lenoble 1999, 173-174 No. HBG VI/1/16 & VI/1/108, 191-192, Figs. 8, 13 and, for the profile example, Dunham 1963, 22 No. 23-5-579, Fig. 17c at Meroë. See also Lohwasser 2004, 122-123. Török (1999, 133f.) argues that Tum. III and VI at El-Hobagi should be seen as having a status below that of the Ballana rulers, but instead with those of the 'uppermost - yet non-royal, echelon of the society' at Qustul, Firka and Gamai; see also n. 50 below.

a recently restored example found by Griffith in the 4th Cataract Napatan cemetery at Sanam in 1912/13. Both vessels have been identified by Angelika Lohwasser as of Phoenician origin and dating around the mid 1st mill. BC, more or less contemporary with the Sanam grave but nearly a millennium earlier than the Addi Gelamo hoard, the latter therefore an heirloom in its context.³⁰ As this identification now negates both ‘parading bull’ bowls as Napatan vessels, we cannot now say they are directly related or whether they arrived via different routes to Napata and Addi Gelamo.

Aksumite contact with the outside world has mostly been viewed from a commercial standpoint, and the rise of the ‘Empire’ is ascribed to its increased dominance over the Red Sea trade as well as the inland trade between the Nile and the Red Sea. We should consider the second the more important and certainly the earlier of the two, as is evident from the physical location of the capitals/centres of Yeha and Aksum if nothing else. But contact with the outside world was not confined to mere commercial trade. Certainly Aksumite trade was of prime importance abroad, judging from some external texts, but they are primarily commercial in outlook and this is to be expected. The Ezana and other royal inscriptions served to both underline and reinforce the power of the king involved. Indeed, the pyramidal nature of Aksumite hierarchy indicates the king was all-powerful if not omnipotent. The minting of coinage itself was evidence of Aksum’s position of supreme commercial power abroad, and it issued coins for nearly four centuries from the mid/late 3rd c. AD. So powerful was Aksum in the 3rd c. that the Persian historian Mani saw Aksum as one of the four great empires of his days, together with Persia, ‘Sileos’ (China?) and Rome. Gift-exchange between powerful heads of state and, made clear in the royal texts, tribute from vassal or conquered peoples were as much a feature of foreign contact and importation as was commercial enterprise.³¹ The two, in fact, can hardly have existed without each other, as is evident from the kings’ need to subdue, expand and maintain his borders and routes of communication in order to maintain his hegemony and authority, and then to publicise his deeds. His tribute and revenue

was substantial, to judge from the royal inscriptions, but consists mostly of material not archaeological recognisable as such. If nothing else, his armies had to be fed and paid, much probably in kind whilst on campaign, and we may expect individual soldiers brought back goods for themselves as well as their king. More came into Aksum than the trade that funneled through it, and it is not surprising that parallels in weaponry, especially, would exist.

The *Periplus* spells out Aksum’s role as middleman in bringing ivory from far inland into the Red Sea trading network in the mid 1st c. AD, although without contemporary archaeological confirmation, and there was no reason to believe this situation had diminished. The ‘Tomb of the Brick Arches,’ dated to the later 4th c. AD, essentially is a closed and limited context, a ‘window in time’ that should be considered together with the far more comprehensively robbed ‘Mausoleum’ (and ‘East Tomb’), both earlier 4th c. AD in date. Together, the ‘Brick Arches’ and ‘Mausoleum’ tombs have produced a large variety of grave goods in different media that illustrate what was considered suitable for their occupants. Habitation levels at Bieta Giyorgis earlier than and contemporary with these tombs help balance the picture at Aksum for this ‘Classical Aksumite’ period, but they are as yet only summarily published. In contrast to these contexts, the BIEA Late Aksumite excavations are confined to less than élite habitation levels not earlier than the late 5th c. AD. Foreign connections here are not as great as in the earlier élite tombs, either because it is a lower level of society or a different period in time. Of the two possibilities, the former seems more reasonable. The Bieta Giyorgis material, perhaps on a higher social scale, includes a late 2nd-3rd c. AD carnelian ring bezel, glass vessels, unribbed amphorae in early levels, and the initial appearance of ribbed amphorae in late 4th c. contexts.³²

The quantity of ivory recovered in ‘Brick Arches’ amply confirms the scale of the trade, and indicates not only of the extent of through and export traffic, but also its origins.³³ The BIEA excavations have now confirmed the presence of mostly elephant but also hippopotamus ivory at Aksum. The latter was recovered in Pre-Aksumite habitation contexts,³⁴ and the animal itself inhabited not only the area to its west as far as the Nile valley but also to the south, pos-

30 Lohwasser 2002; 2004, with further references. She dates the grave in which it was found, Sanam 850, on typological grounds to within her Middle Napatan period, c. second half of 7th to not later than the reign of Aspelta, first half of the 6th c. BC when the cemetery was abandoned; see Lohwasser 2010, 6f., 95f.

31 For general theoretical discussion of such gift-exchange, see Bleiberg 1996, 3-28 passim.

32 Manzo 2005, 57f., Fig. 15. For the ‘Tomb of the Brick Arches,’ ‘Mausoleum’ and ‘East Tomb,’ see Munro-Hay 1989, 55-60, 75, 100-101 and Phillipson 2000, I, 31-133, 157-224.

33 Phillips 1998.

34 Phillips 2000, II, 345.

sibly in the rivers and certainly the Lake Tana area.³⁵ Worked and raw pieces both have been recovered. Worked ivory, mostly found in 'Brick Arches,' also provides evidence for the local production of objects strongly influenced by Graeco-Roman convention, and thus further continuation of a strong veneer of foreign influence at least at the élite level, strikingly comparable to the Saba'an influence on *D'MT*. The ivory female figure in *controposto* pose found in 'Brick Arches' is an Aksumite product, despite her classical appearance and foreign hairstyle,³⁶ and was buried together with other objects of similar inspiration and yet local workmanship. Certainly, the extremely classical-looking human face on the failed bronze casting of a large rondel in 'Brick Arches' also is an Aksumite product, as the integral surrounding inscription is in Ethiopic script.³⁷ A small bronze plaque in low raised relief depicting two (of three Graces?) figures in similar pose and similarly flat profile may also be Aksumite, but the only clearly three-dimensional human figures known from Aksum are two bronze possible vessel handles representing 'slaves' that Anfray has identified rather generally as Alexandrian. Elsewhere, a rather crude ivory plaque with Egyptian-type lotus flowers was recovered at the 'K Site.'³⁸

Much of the carved ivory in 'Brick Arches' seems to have originated from a single large object, plausibly an ivory chair or throne with carved panels.³⁹ The

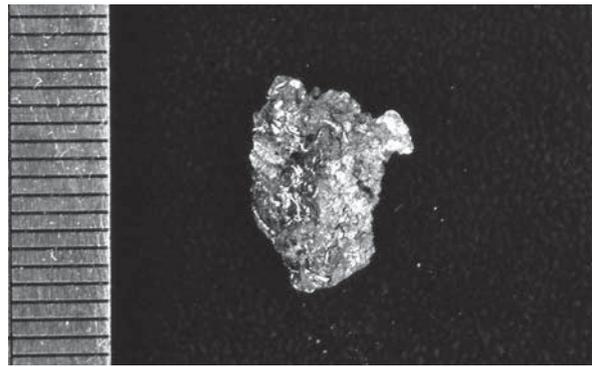


Fig. 1: Gold thread fragments still in their matrix (AX94 M/178\, scale in mm, courtesy the British Institute in Eastern Africa and David Phillipson). Smaller fragments (AX 94 M/211, 304\) also were recovered.

large matched panels, possibly the throne back, also are a mixture of classical style and Aksumite details, and well illustrate the high quality of Aksumite ivory carving. Is this a frank Aksumite adoption of Mediterranean royal and ecclesiastical iconography, epitomised for us by the ivory thrones of Solomon and Maximianus?⁴⁰ If this putative throne and other objects were carved at Aksum, as they undoubtedly are, one well may ask if similar finished objects also were exported to the coast and beyond, together with the unworked raw goods such as the tusk recovered at Adulis.⁴¹ Finished products weigh less than the raw material. The carved ivory recovered at Aksum may yet be the basis for art historical assessment of an Aksumite relief style that might be detected beyond its borders, such as in the Mediterranean, to indicate its export there. Detailed study is required, but initially at least it seems that Aksum may have exported not only the raw goods that funneled through it to the coast but also may have dealt in indigenous finished products using imported raw materials.

Gold too is noted as an export commodity funneled presumably eastward through Aksum from the mines of western Ethiopia, and possibly also panned in the Aksum region.⁴² Extremely little gold has been recovered in the tombs, all of which were robbed, but some twisted or woven gold thread fragments (Fig. 1, col. fig. 16) found in the 'Mausoleum' give

this tomb and Phillipson 2002.

40 Kings 10, 18-20; Wikipedia n.d.; see also Barnett 1982, Pl. 52a for a reconstructed example from Salamis, c. 800 BC.

41 See Munro-Hay 1990, 174.

42 Phillipson 2006; Sutton 2008. The incredibly trusting 'silent trade' in gold between Aksum and Agau to the southwest is recorded by Kosmas Indicopleustes in the mid 6th. c. AD; see Munro-Hay 1990, 171; Burstein 1998, 91-93 No. 18. Asamerew Desie et al. (2002) record gold was still being panned at Mai Adrasha near modern Endasellassie (Shire) in the late 1990s.

35 The *Periplus* records rare instances of elephants near Adulis (Casson 1989, 52-53 [§4.2.12-13]), and Nonnasos saw some 5000 of them near Aue on his way to Aksum (Wilson 1994, 28 [2b]). Manzo (1998, 37) notes they also were recorded in Eritrea in the 1930s.

36 Phillips 1997, 77f., Fig. 2; Phillipson 2000, I, 123f., Fig. 105. Its inspiration likely was the 'Aphrodite Anadyomene' ('rising from the sea') type, mostly represented in the nude although the 'Venus de Milo' is a partially clothed example; see Vassilika 1998, 74-75 No. 35. The pose is found in many regions influenced by the Graeco-Roman world including many images in Nubia (e.g., Wenig 1978, 105, Fig. 80, 320 No. 284; Mills 1982, Pl. V.1.6).

37 Schneider (2000, 512-513) dates it to the second half of the 3rd c. AD, about a century earlier than its context; see also Phillipson 2000 I, 97-100. The face strongly resembles images of both Alexander the Great and the mythological Medusa (whose severed head adorned the shield of Perseus and the aegis of Athena), with hair apparently wildly flowing in many different directions; see, e.g. Barnett 1982, Pl. 65d. Either suggested model can only be speculative, but again both images are known throughout the Graeco-Roman world. The rondel image itself likely represents a solar deity.

38 Chittick 1974, 199-200, Fig. 23e; Munro-Hay 1989, 220-221, Fig. 15, 104; Anfray 1990, 109, 111, Fig.; Phillipson 2000 II, 407, Fig. 358a.

39 Phillips 1997, 78-80, Fig. 3; Phillipson 2000, I, 117-119, Figs. 98-99. See the latter for other ivory artefacts from

one pause for thought. ‘Cloth of gold’ too was a royal, élite and ecclesiastical prerogative in the Mediterranean world, and Kaleb (Ella Atsbeha) wore a loincloth and a ‘turban’ made of linen and gold as part of his royal regalia when he received Justinian I’s ambassador Julian at Aksum in 530/531 AD.⁴³ Could this textile have been a commodity imported from the Roman or Byzantine world to Aksum, or perhaps one that could have been made and even also exported from Aksum? Was the cloth really linen, or did the observer misidentify it? Linen is the usual material employed but perhaps weaker cotton was used instead; evidence for both flax and cotton was recovered at the site.⁴⁴

The wingless and beardless sphinx iconography in northern Ethiopia, the much-cited stone figurine from Pre-Aksumite Addi Gramaten (or Addi Keramaten) and the lesser-known altar from Fiya (identified as a pair of sphingi but the heads are lost), have long been considered to have Nubian/Egyptian influence or even origin. However, the image is so widespread throughout the ancient world even before the 1st mill. BC that a focused Nilotic origin cannot be considered without specifically isolating other details pointing in that direction, such as the inclusion of the royal beard. Two Saba’an objects depicting sphinxes generally contemporary with and stylistically similar to the Addi Gramaten sphinx are now published, as is a Levantine sculpture with strongly Ptolemaic features found in the Yemen and inscribed with a 3rd c. AD Saba’an text.⁴⁵ The

extremely limited number of examples and their ‘Pre-Aksumite’ dating would suggest they should relate to élite Saba’an influence, if anything. Both findsites are ceremonial, and the Addi Gramaten sphinx was recovered with an altar having a South Arabian inscription.

Lions, however, are another matter. Henri de Contenson excavated a cast figurine/attachment of a reclining lion with head turned, one forepaw crossed over the other, and wearing an excessively large collar ‘necklace’ in the Level II élite structure beside the old Maryam Tsion cathedral, dated to the 4th-7th c. AD.⁴⁶ It is virtually identical to one (Figs. 2-3) recovered in Tum. 6 at Hammur Abbasiya, the late 4th-6th c. AD burial of an ‘important person’ within what suggestively is an Upper Nubian royal cemetery in the Dongola Reach of the Nile valley. Mahmoud el-Tayeb quotes some ‘nearest parallels’ in the royal cemetery of Lower Nubia at Ballana/Qustul, and others also are known.⁴⁷ Although none of them have crossed forepaws, all have turned heads, are of cast metal and generally similar scale, and suggest possible functions for both the Hammur and Aksum lions. Earlier Nubian examples of lions with crossed forepaws include the large granite leonine statues originally set up at Soleb by Amenhotep III (Dynasty 18) but moved to Jebel Barkal by King Ameniso in the mid 3rd c. BC, two Meroitic sandstone statues from the early 1st c. AD Temple 1000 at Hamadab, and a faience amulet from tomb W 571 at Meroë.⁴⁸ As the presentation of the Aksum lion seems to be unique in Ethiopia, it more likely is a Nubian import than an Aksumite product.

A more immediate cross-cultural influence lies in ceremonial *accoutrements* and weaponry. Similar excessively large and probably ceremonial centrally-ribbed iron spear/lanceheads waisted near the point have been recovered in ‘Brick Arches’ and two at El-Hobagi, whilst a short waisted example also was found at Ballana.⁴⁹ Their profiles differ, that at

the former.

43 As described by Theophanes; see Burstein 1998, 125 Doc. 26 (transcribed at <http://www29.homepage.villanova.edu/christopher.haas/Ethiopia-txts.htm>). The ‘Mausoleum’ fragments were recovered in its primary deposit level, representing its earlier 4th c. AD construction and primary use; see Phillipson 2000, I, 200f., Fig. 177d; Harlow and Phillips 2000, I, 180f.

44 Although weaker than linen, cotton might have been used if the quantity of gold thread was minimised. Isolated cotton seeds were recovered in ‘Brick Arches’ (Boardman 2000, I, 127), and over the Late Aksumite levels at ‘D site and ‘K Site,’ together with abundant evidence for flax. Woven cotton fragments also were excavated in late 5th c. AD level at ‘D Site;’ see Boardman 2000, I, 127; II, 345-346, 365-368, 412-413, Figs. 303, 323, 364. Both cotton and linen also were imported inland, according to the *Periplus* (Casson 1989, 52-55 [§6.2.23-6.3.3], 110-114). Cotton also is recorded at Meroë and now cotton seeds at Hamadab/Kabushiya in the Meroitic period (Pawel Wolf, pers. comm.).

45 Fattovich (1990, 24) and Manzo (1998, 39) argue for a possible Egyptian or Meroitic iconographic origin as they traditionally are wingless, but see Simpson 2002, 134 No. 165, 168-169 No. 213. Anfray (1990, 42-44) focuses on their textual connection with Sab’a. Discussion of the Addi Gramaten and Fiya sphingi by Curtis and Habtemichael (2008, 324-325) includes a colour photograph of

46 De Contenson (1963, 12, Pl. XIVa-b), identified as being of ‘bronze.’ The Hammur attachment was identified by analysis as brass, but as yet has not been cleaned; see Zurawski and Phillips 1999, 52; Mahmoud el-Tayeb 2003, 136.

47 Four silver bridle accoutrements, bronze terminals on lock hasps of a wooden box, and silver attachments decorating the clasp of another; see Emery and Kirwan 1938, I, 127 No. 54, 255 No. 329-330; II, Pls. 59, 109B, now also Török 1991, Pls. 45.93, upper left, 68.54; Wenig 1978, 105, Fig. 80.

48 Taylor 1991, 36, Fig. 42; Török 1997, I, 234-235 No. 1000-11; II, Pl. 197; Dunham 1963, 292, Fig. 176.14, 294 No. 23-3-305.

49 Lenoble et al. 1994, 84, Pl. 16.193; Lenoble 2004, 188,



Fig. 2a-b: 'Bronze' lion attachment from Aksum (National Archaeological Museum, Addis Ababa J.E. 1272, reproduced from De Contenson 1963: Pl. XIV.a-b).

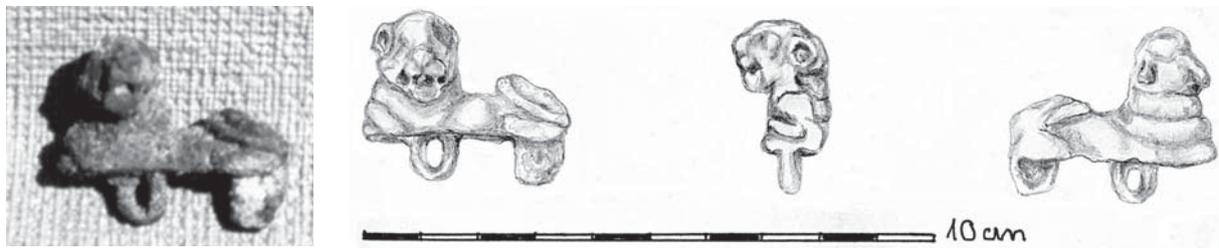


Fig. 3a-b: Brass lion attachment from Hammur Abbasiya Tum 6 (SDRS 98/48; photo by Kazik Kotlewski, drawing by Anna Błaszczuk, courtesy Bogdan Żurawski). It has not yet been cleaned.

Aksum being more pronounced as well as larger in scale, but all are ribbed. The idea of ceremonial weaponry certainly is common in Northeastern Africa, but the rare and particular shape of these artifacts suggests more than just general dispersion or independent invention of the type. Manzo also proposed the many straight-edged ribbed examples recovered in these same tombs⁵⁰ (and others elsewhere in the Nile valley) lacking the waist have their origin, or at least inspiration, in Nubia. More practical is an iron arrowhead recovered in (or around) the tomb of Kaleb in the 1906 DAE excavations. It is the single-barb type ubiquitous at late Meroitic and

Post-Meroitic sites throughout the Nile valley, and so suggestively also originating from there.⁵¹ Aksumite arrowheads generally are barbless, although other forms are known. The diorite archers' loose recovered in a 'much-disturbed' fill re-deposited in the courtyard of the later 4th-5th c. AD 'Tomb of the False Door' at Aksum must also be considered more conclusively an import from Nubia where the type is well-known. After over two decades of intensive excavation, it remains the only example found in Ethiopia.⁵²

Figs. 131-133; Phillipson 2000, 111, 113, Fig. 93; Emery and Kirwan 1938, II, Pl. 50B, right.

50 See Manzo 1998, 40. Spearheads of similar scale although not waisted are more numerous and often found in major Nubian tomb ensembles. Examples include El-Hobagi, Hammur Tum. 6, Ballana and Qustul, Gammai, Firka, and Qasr Ibrim; see Żurawski and Phillips 1999, 52; Mahmoud el-Tayeb 2003, 136; Bates & Dunham 1927, 93 No. R26, Pl. LXVII.18; Emery and Kirwan 1938, II, Pl. 50; Kirwan 1939, Pl. XV.A.11/33; Mills 1982, Pls. XL.7.1, LXXXVI.6. These tombs correspond to Török's 'uppermost - yet non-royal, echelon of the society' of Lower Nubia; see n. 29 above. Others at Aksum (in the 'Mausoleum,' 'Tomb of the Brick Arches' and 'Shaft Tomb B') are not very large; see, e.g., Munro-Hay 1989, 224-226 and Figs.; Phillipson 2000, I, 111-112, Fig. 92j-q, 203-204, Fig. 180e-f, n, q.

51 For the Aksum example, see Zahn 1913, 220-221 No. 113, Fig. 437.113; see also Phillips 2011, 387, Fig. 5. Bard et al. (2001, 47) note another (unillustrated) arrowhead at Bieta Giyorgis, without mentioning the number of its barbs. Nubian examples are too numerous to list, but some are cited in Phillips 1987, 39; Edwards 1998, 127. See Lenoble 1987, 109-110, Pls. VII.49-62., XIV.20-134; Lenoble 1987, Pls. VII, XIV; Lenoble et al. 1994, 79, Pl. 11.190 for a good selection of examples.

52 Munro-Hay 1989, 319, Fig. 18.9; Phillips 1995, 8. A good selection of late Meroitic and early Post-Meroitic examples from Gebel Adda is illustrated in colour in Grzymalski 2010, 27, Fig. 3; those on the lower row are direct parallels to the Aksum example. Manzo (1998, 40) suggests it is from an Early Aksumite funerary context but, if so, the earthen fill of its context was deliberately transported from elsewhere and dumped in the courtyard sometime after the tomb was constructed - although when this

Imported glass, as studied by Helen Morrison for Chittick and now by Michael Harlow and Andrea Manzo, in general is first imported in the 'Proto-Aksumite' period. Most have wide-ranging parallels from Nubia through Syria and Arabia as well as the Roman world, and include a number of pieces in contexts later than their stylistic dates. Some of those recovered in later tomb contexts may have been heirlooms in Aksum for two or more centuries before burial, or alternatively arrived as antiques only shortly before. Glassware recovered at Bieta Giyorgis indicates some arrived generally contemporary with their context dates, but the number found in sometimes much later tombs suggests both alternatives are possible. The arduous inland journey must have made any surviving vessels extremely valuable on arrival, and underlines the substantial wealth of Aksum implicit in the quantity recovered in the Aksum tombs.⁵³

Glass beads (surprisingly not mentioned in the *Periplus* unless they are the λιθιας υ<α>λης, 'glass stones')⁵⁴ also are an imported as well as locally produced item at Aksum. Faceted glass beads, now suggested to be from India rather than Egypt, are rare in Nubia although common enough in the élite tombs at Aksum. Although recorded at élite burials such as at Ballana/Qustul, Meroë, Firka and El-Hobagi,⁵⁵ they more likely were imported via Aksum rather than the Nile as they are found either as singletons or in very small quantities. So too some Ptolemaic mosaic glass beads noted by Manzo in an élite 'Proto-Aksumite' tomb at Bieta Giyorgis.⁵⁶

Glass colour and technical ranges recovered at Aksum too are extensive. It is possible, for example, that the unusual glass colours otherwise not found in the Classical world may have been exported elsewhere from Aksumite workshops. A highly unusual 'red-coloured' glass recovered at Meroë may be paralleled only at Aksum, for example.⁵⁷ This suggests (if so) it may have been exported to Meroë from

Aksum. Glassworking (although not glass-making) is known at Aksum, and undoubtedly reused fragments of objects that did not survive the journey from the coast were melted down for reuse, mixing colours together to obtain the unusually wide range present here. The same situation has been increasingly suggested for Meroë, although the evidence for glass production there and elsewhere in Upper Nubia remains extremely limited but now becoming more evident.⁵⁸ Certain glass vessel forms, most notably the set of goblets having thick looped trails on the body recovered in the early 3rd c. AD Gudit tomb II and others elsewhere by Chittick and Fattovich,⁵⁹ are of 'Aegypto-Roman' type although possibly not manufacture. Fragments of similar goblets more recently recovered in later 'Mausoleum' and 'K Site' contexts are of finer workmanship and darker bluish-green in colour. If this vessel form is both imported and locally copied, these latter examples are more likely to be imported heirlooms of 1st-3rd c. AD date and the Gudit vessels Aksumite products probably of similar date. At least one fragment recovered at Quseir may represent the same vessel type; could this be Aksumite rather than Roman?⁶⁰ The burgundy 'flute' and cobalt blue 'tankard' from 'Brick Arches,' each over 22 cm tall, may or may not have been imported. Each is unique at Aksum, and difficult to parallel elsewhere. The burgundy 'flute' has a general comparison in the two well-known decorated goblets from Sedeinga, but that in Pyr. Beg. N. 5 at Meroë and colourless 'flutes' also found at Sedeinga and elsewhere too are comparable, and Cool has argued for their Meroitic rather than Roman manuf-

occurred is another question. The Gebel Adda (and other) parallels also would suggest a late date for the loose itself.

53 Morrison 1989; Harlow 2000; Manzo 2005, 55-56, Fig. 11; Phillips 2009.

54 Casson 1989, 52-53 (§6.2.25); see discussion in Phillips 2009, 39.

55 Harlow 2000, I, 85; Tomber 2008, 93; see also Emery and Kirwan 1938, I, 207, Cat. 123; II, Pl. 43.44. Dunham (1957, 118, Fig. 78.22-1-22d; 1963, 185, Fig. 132g, 355, Fig. 8.VIIIa [see p. 183]) and Kirwan (1939, Pl. XX.16) do not specify material.

56 Manzo 2005, 54, Figs. 7-8.

57 Lindsay Allason-Jones (pers. comm.); see Phillips 1999, 189. Manzo (2005, 56) also has noted glass colours at Early Aksumite Bieta Giyorgis comparable with those at Meroë.

58 Cool 1996, for Meroë, and Pawel Wolf (pers. comm. and Wolf et al. 2008, 213, Fig. 74c) for Hamadab, where a piece of raw glass has been found in 2002. Evidence of glass production at Aksum includes waste fragments, a recently excavated glass kiln, and glass beakers copying indigenous ceramic forms; see Manzo 2005, 59; Phillips 2009, 37; Tekle 2008, 33-34, 62; Morrison 1989, 189-190, Fig. 14.15-35, Pl. 14.1.right (compare Wilding 1989, 240-245, Figs. 14.15-45).

59 Morrison 1989, 189, Pl. 14.1, Figs. 14.2-6; Manzo 2005, 56. Phillipson 1998, Pl. 3a is a colour photograph. Harlow 2000, I, 212-213, Fig. 191b ('Mausoleum'), 337-339, Figs. 293d, 294c ('K Site'). Manzo has them as 'probably of Syrian production.' None the less, another fragmentary example was recovered at Karanis (Harden 1936, 151 No. 420, Pl. XVI.420) and Morrison (1989, 189) cites more, including from elsewhere in Ethiopia.

60 Meyer 1992, 166f. No. 355 (also No. 352-353?); see also 39. Its transparent colour would suggest affinity rather with the Gudit vessels. The port operated during the 1st-2nd c., and the Gudit cemetery dates to the 2nd-3rd c. AD. See n. 13 above for Aksumite potsherds also recovered at Quseir.

acture.⁶¹ The highly unusual fluted cobalt blue ‘tankard’ is vaguely comparable in profile to shorter, wider two-handled Roman footed cups, others at Sedeinga also argued as Meroitic, handleless footed cups at Qasr Ibrim and, less directly, to a blue-green tooled handleless beaker reportedly from Syria. Its colour also is comparable to a similarly-shaped dark blue base of a goblet in Meroë Pyr. Beg. W. 109 as well as the decorated Sedeinga goblets.⁶² None, however, are single-handled or as exaggerated in profile as the ‘tankard,’ suggesting the possibility of Aksumite production inspired by any or all of them.⁶³

The most readily identified imports found at Aksum in contexts perhaps as early as the 2nd c. and certainly from the late 4th-early 7th c. AD are the wheel-made ‘Mediterranean’ amphorae, usually ribbed. Manzo has tabulated those from Bieta Giyorgis, noting changes in style and fabric from the ‘Early Aksumite’ through ‘Post-Aksumite’ periods, the later range paralleling those from the BIEA excavations.⁶⁴ Others also have been recovered at many Aksumite sites throughout northern Ethiopia/Eritrea, in a variety of fabrics. Fabric analysis of the BIEA examples by David Williams has indicated a number of sources and standard types of generally contemporary date from the eastern Mediterranean and northern Red Sea. At Aksum, however, they are recovered solely in secondary contexts, some even in reuse. Most common are of the late 4th-5th c. AD ‘Ayla-Aksum’ type having a granitic fabric, which Williams suggests may have originated from the Aqaba kilns. The second most common is Roman LR I from either Cyprus or north-western Syria/Cilicia. The wine (or other commodities) imported in these vessels may or may not have been consumed

by those who lived in these buildings.⁶⁵ Similar, although not yet subjected to petrographic analysis, LR 1 amphora fragments of either Cyprus or north-western Syria/Cilicia have been recovered along the Nile valley at least as far south as just downriver of the 4th Cataract at Bakhit.⁶⁶ Their transportation routes differ, however, one along the Nile and the other via the Red Sea. More certainly of Nubian origin is a table amphora⁶⁷ in Adams’ Utility ware U2, originating in the area of Aswan. Excavated without context by local workmen at Aksum, it is a reminder of the 30-day land journey between Aksum and Aswan cited by Procopius.⁶⁸ Also ‘Mediterranean’ is a number of wheel-made ledge-rim bowls of ‘African Red Slip’ ware, imports readily identified at Aksum and elsewhere from the mid 4th c. AD onwards. They heavily influenced local Aksumite pottery styles as handmade adaptations of the form and some decorative derivations are clearly recognisable. Manzo also has noted continued ceramic imitation of contemporary Roman glassware at this time.⁶⁹

Chittick identified (unillustrated) ‘basket-’ or ‘mat-impressed’ sherds at Aksum as of Nubian origin, but also noted, ‘it would be surprising ... if such fragile vessels had been transported for a very long

61 Cool 1996; Leclant 1973; Dunham 1957, 126f., Fig. 83.21-12-47c; Whitehouse 1997, 251 No. 429, Fig. 429, all dated to the second half of the 3rd c. AD.

62 Whitehouse 1997, 90-91 No. 130, Fig. 130, dated to the second half of the 1st c. AD; Mills 1982, Pls. XIV.14.2, XXII.23.31; Dunham 1963, 199 No. 545, 201 Fig. 144.c; Anon. 1991, 96 No. 1. Cobalt blue was a common colour for glass vessels until the late 1st c. AD, then rapidly fell out of use although use of dark blue and yellow continued at least until the end of the 2nd c. AD; see Meyer 1992, 16. The blue-green beaker is dated to the late 2nd c. AD.

63 I had earlier (Phillips 2009) considered the vessels mentioned in this paragraph as imports to Aksum, but have become increasingly aware of, and leaning towards, the possibility of indigenous manufacture with inspiration from Roman forms. The bases of these vessels seem somewhat overpowering when compared to the more delicate Roman examples. None the less, imports must have arrived so they could be imitated and adapted by indigenous glassworkers, as also noted for ceramic imitations of Mediterranean vessels in glass and metal.

64 Manzo 2005, 63f., Fig. 23.

65 Williams 2000; published examples are Phillips 2000, I, 196; II, 326-328, 335, 394-395, Figs. 283a-c, 290j, 343a. This is Peacock and Williams’ (1986, 185-187) Class 44. More recent analysis of Aqaba amphorae and LR I in the Aksumite region further clarifies these identifications and origins; see Peacock et al. 2007, 95-96.

66 Emery and Kirwan 1938 II, Pl. 111.11-12; see Williams 2000, 496. Sherds mentioned in urawski 2003, 347 (Ed-Deiga 1), 372 (Bakhit 11) and elsewhere within the SDRS survey have been identified as LR I amphorae from either Cyprus or north-western Syria/Cilicia by Henryk Meyza (pers. comm., from drawings and fabric samples).

67 Phillipson 1998, 65-67, Fig. 23, lower right; see Adams 1986, II, 545 for the ware, which he dates within 500-850 AD. My thanks to Pamela Rose (pers. comm.) for confirming the ware identification. Scarring indicates both handles had been deliberately removed for alternative use, presumably at Aksum. This vessel would compliment the footed bowl fragment probably of Nubian ware R1, dating within 450-650 AD (less likely Aswani ware R4, 550-850 AD) recovered by Chittick near Heis, on the Somali coast of the Gulf of Aden; see Chittick 1982, 53 (with comments by Shinnie, 55) and, for the site itself, Chittick 1976, 119; the fabric was identified by William Y. Adams. Ware date ranges are those in Adams 1986, II, 467, Table 44, 542, Table 54, not as quoted by Chittick. Whilst he noted, ‘it is more likely that it reached the remote corner of Africa where it was found by sea rather than land,’ this more likely probability does not preclude it having sailed south only from Adulis. Another ribbed table amphora of different profile was recovered in the 6th c. AD Tomb ‘D’ at Matara; see Anfray and Annequin 1965, 80, Pl. LVIII 4.

68 Burstein 1998, 73, Doc. 13.

69 Manzo 2005, 57, 60, Fig. 18.

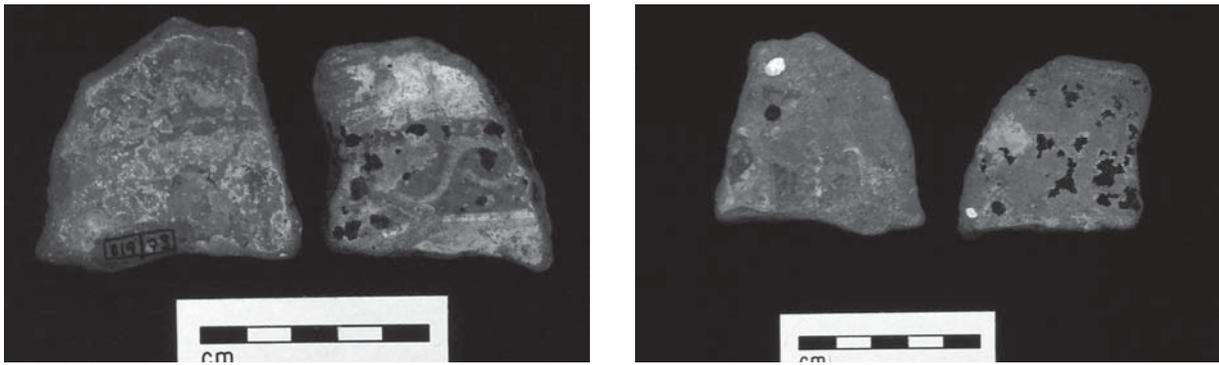


Fig. 4.a-b: 'Soba ware' bowl sherds (AX 818-819/73, scale in cm, both courtesy British Institute in Eastern Africa and David Phillipson). The line of red, blue and white dots on the exterior of both sherds was added by the excavators and the amorphous strongly black surface areas on 818/73 are the result of its context conditions. 818/73 is a rim and 819/73 a body sherd.

distance.' Further research and finds have concluded these impressed vessels are indigenous rather than imports. Some surfaces clearly have been impressed in manufacture on riddling sieves directly comparable to those still in use in Tigray today, whilst other impression types are not comparable to Nubian examples when considered in detail.⁷⁰ However, two non-joining sherds recovered by Chittick in a problematic but apparently 6th c. AD Stelae Park fill context at Aksum are imports of 'Soba Ware' (Fig. 4, col. fig. 15). This very specific ware is almost exclusively found at Soba near modern Khartoum. They likely represent the same convex bowl having brightly painted but obscure designs on both surfaces, the rim sherd in red and white only and the body sherd also in black. Wheel-made, this is the only object in Ethiopia plausibly from the capital of the Kingdom of Alwa,⁷¹ and seems to be the first direct archaeological evidence illustrating the presence of the Aksumites (missionaries or traders?) in Alwa, perhaps even at Soba, that so annoyed Longinus when he arrived there about 580 AD.⁷² At Soba itself the ware is generally dated to the 'Early Christian' period, roughly the late 6th-8th c. AD, although sherds were recorded throughout

all subsequent occupation phases. Not surprisingly, such foreign imports and influences disappear from Aksum when coins were no longer minted, the Empire disintegrated from within and commercial Red Sea hegemony had passed over to the Persians by the mid 7th c. AD.

Much of the new material discussed in this paper expands or confirms existing knowledge, and clarifies some earlier known material. The archaeological evidence itself has substantially altered over the past two decades, with scholarly interpretation of the situation and the societies involved having undergone considerable revision, as has our interpretation of some known material. The identifiable recovered material actually transported between Aksum and Nubia remains exceedingly small and insubstantial, and mostly into Aksum from Nubia. The vast majority consists of visible 'bric-a-brac,' pocket-sized artifacts easily brought with them by travellers virtually as 'tourist souvenirs' incidental to the real activity underlying their presence abroad - the odd coin, bead, amulet, metal artefact, potsherd and pot, possibly also casual graffiti. More substantial are the travertine alabastron at Yeha and one of the two bronze bowls from Addi Gelamo, but these two larger items seem to stand alone as potential 'diplomatic gifts' (if such they were). The questionably Ge'ez graffiti in Nubia would imply their writers were cognisant with the language and script to some very limited degree, and may have identified themselves but apparently not their purpose(s) for being abroad. A certain understanding of Egyptian/Nubian ideology may be implied in at least one of the two *ankh* glyphs in Ethiopia and perhaps also the 'cippus of Horus,' although the small 'souvenir' scarabs and amulets recovered in the polity are more problematic even when recovered in sacral contexts. Some weaponry and ceremonial *accoutrements* are related in small but telling ways, adaptations or acquisitions recog-

70 Chittick 1982, 51-52; Wilding and Munro-Hay 1989, 315; Phillips 2000, II, 333f., Fig. 288; Phillipson 2000, II, 376, Fig. 331; see also Manzo 2005, 59; Phillips 2010.

71 Phillips 1997, 455; my thanks to Derek Welsby (pers. comm.), for confirming this identification from the photographs illustrated here. See Welsby and Daniels 1991, 33f., 214, 324-334; Welsby 1998, 141-167, Figs. 79-104, 170-172 for 'Soba ware' at Soba. The condition of the sherds makes direct comparison of the painted design difficult, but it includes a simple guilloche-type design on the interior similar to Welsby and Daniels 1991, 327, Fig. 183.385-386. 'White' ranges into 'cream' and 'yellowish,' and red into 'orangish' and 'brownish' shades. The context itself is mixed.

72 Vantini 1975, 20; Burstein 1998, 114, Doc. 23; see also Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 30, who calls them 'missionaries.'

nisably different and (possibly) superior to one's own. Aksumite adaptation of Roman coinage design and weights not only implies an perceived equality of the Aksumite king with the Roman emperor, but also the considered need to participate in a monetary system already in use abroad, a political statement as well as commercial reality. It says much that only one coin has been recovered in non-monetary Nubia. Indeed, much of what used to be considered evidence for the meager quantity of imported/exported artifacts between Nubia and Aksum either has been queried or can now be envisaged more as disparate north-south connections with the Mediterranean world by two peoples who both were influenced from the north far more than each other. Transported material is predominantly known only through the surviving texts but finished products are not recognised abroad barring coins and, recently, ceramics. What is more fully revealed also, however, is the extent to which Aksum produced its own 'foreign' style and goods, and the probability that such goods may also have been exported in exchange for incoming requirements. Finished goods subtly reproducing foreign imports may not yet have been understood as indigenous, such as the glass vessels at both Aksum and Sedeinga. We should stop thinking only in terms of 'imports' to Aksum, even from Nubia. A surface veneer of 'influence' and of indigenous production of finished products for their own use as well as possibly for export is recognisable and identifiable in several media of both civilisations. Much more art historical and scientific research is required, specifically detailed study of the material remains, but it may be possible eventually to more fully understand the involvement of Aksum (the capital), in Aksumite (the Empire) relations with its neighbours and trading partners.

Addendum: Alessandro Bausi kindly has informed me of a new publication, George Hatke, "Aksum and Nubia: Warfare, Commerce, and Political Fictions in Ancient Northeast Africa", New York: Institute for the Study of the Ancient World. New York Press, 2013, as this paper was sent to the editors. I have been unable to see it, but further consideration of the subject undoubtedly will be discussed there.

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TITELBILD: Säulenbasis mit Löwe, Große Anlage von Musawwarat es Sufra, Raum 108
(Foto: Claudia Näser)

FRONTISPIZ: Der Jubilar im Garten seines Hauses in Berlin-Karow
(Foto: Jane Humphris, Bildbearbeitung: Frank Joachim)

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