

# A New Interpretation of the *Monumentum Adulitanum*

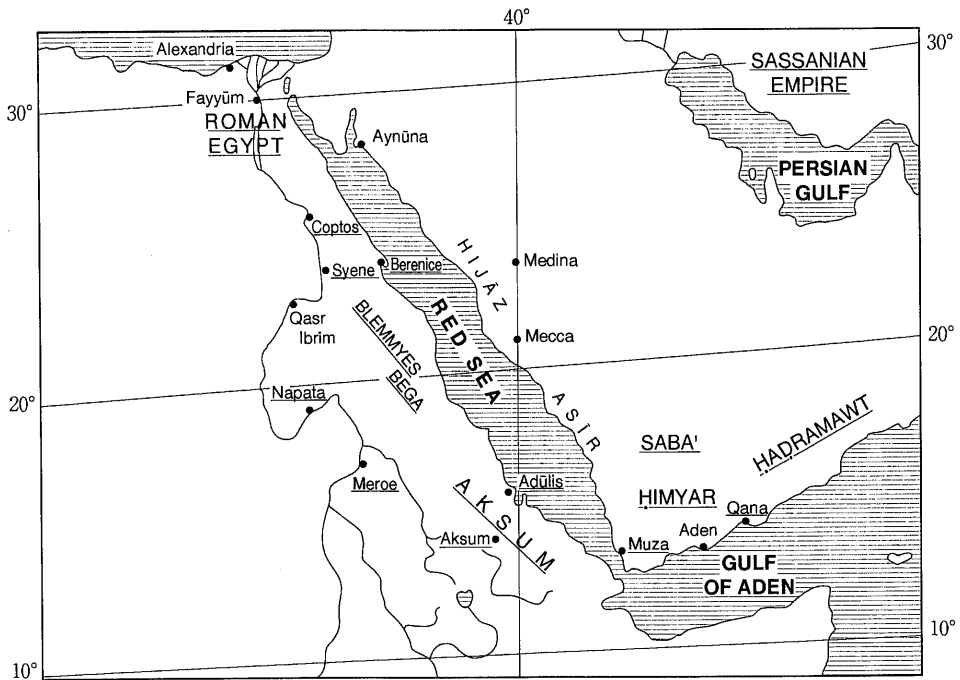
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## Preamble

My aim in this article is to elucidate one of the most important events in the history of the regions bordering the Red Sea and their hinterlands in pre-Islamic times by proposing a new interpretation of the Greek inscription found on the monument generally known as the *Monumentum Adulitanum*, and at the same time I also hope to show that this same event was of epoch-making importance in the history of East-West maritime relations in antiquity.

The third century A.D. was a time during which the Roman Empire was beset with troubles both at home and abroad, and one of its external concerns was the large-scale incursions across the border into Roman Egypt in the mid-third century by the Blemmyes, a nomadic people from the deserts to the south of Egypt.<sup>1)</sup> These incursions, which continued to harass the Romans for several decades and eventually forced them even to modify their border policies, were of a scale and an intensity that exceeded the level of mere depredatory expeditions by nomads, and it is thought that the Blemmyes were in fact migrating north under pressure from the northward advance of the armies of the kingdom of Aksum, situated further south in Ethiopia.<sup>2)</sup>

Testimony to the considerable growth of Aksum's strength at this time is provided by Mānī, the founder of Manichaeism. According to a passage in the *Kephalaia*,<sup>3)</sup> a collection of his sayings attributable to shortly after the mid-third century, Mani declared that there were four great kingdoms in the world at that time, the third of which, following 'the Kingdom of the land of Babylon and of Persia' and 'the Kingdom of the Romans,' was 'the Kingdom of the Aksumites.' Researchers are divided in their opinions on the identity of the fourth 'Kingdom of Silis,' but there is strong support for the view that it corresponded to the Chinese empire. It is quite astonishing that the name of an Ethiopian kingdom should have been mentioned as one of the four most important contemporary kingdoms alongside the Sassanian, Roman and Chinese empires, but the fact that Aksum should have assumed such magnitude in the eyes of Mani, who was active within the Sassanian empire, would indicate that at the time the influence of this kingdom had spread beyond its original borders and was making major advances to the north and east in particular. The fact that gold coinage of high purity and

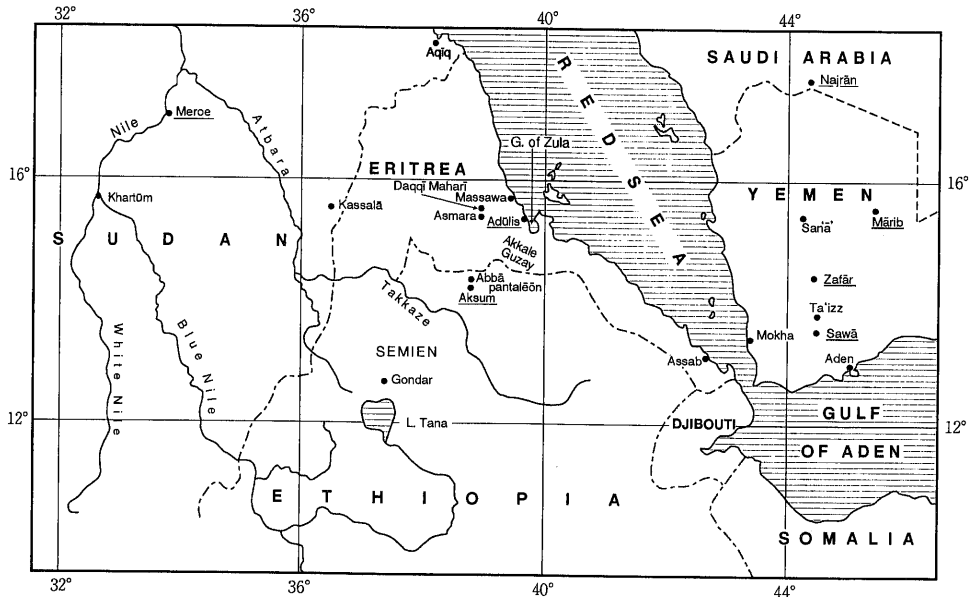


MAP 1: EAST AFRICA AND ARABIA (3rd Cent.)

inscribed with the ruling king's effigy and name began to be issued in the kingdom of Aksum during the final quarter of the third century<sup>4)</sup> and that soon afterwards the orthography of the Ethiopian script, derived from the South Arabian script, appears to have been established<sup>5)</sup> confirm the growth and prosperity of this kingdom. The main thesis put forward below is the proposition that the military campaigns and conquests of regions bordering the Red Sea by the Aksumite king who achieved this great growth are in fact commemorated in the *Monumentum Adulitanum*.

### I. The *Monumentum Adulitanum*

The monument known as the *Monumentum Adulitanum* is a throne-shaped marble monument that was still standing at least in the early part of the sixth century on the western outskirts of the Aksumite port of Adūlis at the starting point of the road leading up to the town of Aksum, the capital of the kingdom of Aksum. Adūlis is generally identified with the ancient remains located about four kilometres inland from the western shores of the Gulf of Zula (a.k.a. Annesley Bay) in Eritrea and called Azūli by the locals.<sup>6)</sup> The present whereabouts of the monument itself is unknown, but we are fortunate in that the text of the Greek inscription engraved on it has been preserved in *The Christian Topography*, a Greek

MAP 2: ETHIOPIA AND SOUTH ARABIA

work written in the mid-sixth century.<sup>7)</sup> Its anonymous author, known under the name of Kosmas Indikopleustes since the eleventh century, was originally a merchant from Alexandria and engaged in the spice trade in the southern seas, but he later became a Nestorian monk and wrote this book.

According to the account given by Kosmas,<sup>8)</sup> the army of the Aksumite king Ellatzbaas (representing the Greek transcription of his Ethiopian name Ella Aṣbeḥā) was about to set out across the sea on an expedition against Ḥimyar in South Arabia just as he (Kosmas) was visiting Adulis at the start of the reign of the Byzantine emperor Justin I (10 July 518 – 1 August 527).<sup>9)</sup> The Jewish king of Ḥimyar had been persecuting the Christians living within his territory, and the aim of this expedition by Ella Aṣbeḥā, himself a Christian, was to subjugate the king of Ḥimyar and rescue his coreligionists. However, while being presumably busily engaged in preparations for this expedition, he is said to have ordered Asbās, the governor of Adulis, to provide him with copies of the Greek inscriptions found on two monuments at Adulis, and Asbās accordingly entrusted Kosmas, who happened to be there, with this task. Kosmas made copies of the inscriptions and delivered them to Asbās, but he also made an extra set of copies which he kept for himself and later included in his account of Aksum in *The Christian Topography*. This work contains in addition sketches of the monuments drawn by Kosmas,<sup>10)</sup> and these too are instructive.

The slab-shaped smaller of the two monuments was erected to commemorate an overwhelming victory won by Ptolemy III in the third century B.C. when, leading a company mounted on African elephants captured in this vicinity, he had

fought with a Seleucid army, especially their troops mounted on Indian elephants, and although the final section of the inscription is missing, its content has long been quite clear. The larger of the two monuments, on the other hand, corresponding to the *Monumentum Adulitanum* with which we are here concerned, is, as was noted above, in the form of a marble throne on which an inscription has been incised. In his description of the stela belonging to Ptolemy III Kosmas expressly states that a small section was missing at the bottom, and this is also clearly shown in his sketch. However, with regard to the throne he makes no such comment, nor is there any such suggestion in his sketch. Yet although the opening section of the inscription would therefore not appear to have been missing, it starts rather abruptly, as will be seen below, with the words 'after this.' It is thus evident that at least the first few lines, which would have recorded the name and titles of the author of the inscription, are missing and that the extant part begins *in mediis rebus*. Kosmas believed that this inscription too belonged to Ptolemy III, and formerly there were many researchers who held the same view. But when one considers that the smaller inscription attributable to Ptolemy III is drafted in the third person, whereas this one is written in the first person, and that Ptolemy III died at the beginning of his twenty-sixth regnal year, whereas the *Monumentum Adulitanum* was set up in the twenty-seventh regnal year of the anonymous author, there can be no doubt that these two inscriptions are the work of separate persons and are unrelated.<sup>11)</sup> The throne inscription reads as follows:<sup>12)</sup>

60. . . . *after this, having become strong and having commanded the peoples nearest the kingdom to keep the peace, I waged war and subdued by battles the following peoples: I made war on the people of Gazē, then, having conquered Agamē and Sigyēne, I seized half their property and peoples. Aua, Zingabēne, Aggabe, Tiamaa, Athagaous, Kalaa and the people of Samēne who live across the Nile in inaccessible and snowbound mountains where storms and icy cold persist and the snowfall is so deep that a man sinks in it up to the knees, I subdued them after crossing the river; then Lasine, Zaa, and Gabala: they dwell on a mountain where hot springs flow. Having subdued the Atalmō, the Bega, and with them all the Taggaite peoples who occupy territories leading to the frontiers of Egypt, I made travel overland feasible along the route leading from the territories of my kingdom as far as Egypt. Then (I overcame) the Annēne and the Metine who live among precipitous mountains. 61. I fought against the people of Sesea who entrenched themselves on a very high and very inaccessible mountain; I surrounded them and forced them to come down and I seized for myself their young, women, children, virgins, and all their belongings. I subdued the people of Rausō who live in the midst of vast, waterless plains in the heart of barbarous country, rich in incense, as well as the people of Solate: I ordered them to watch over the coasts of the sea. 62. All these peoples, defended by mighty mountains, I conquered them and compelled them to submit, taking part myself in the campaign, and I allowed them to keep their land in return for tribute. Most of the others, meanwhile, surrendered and pay tribute of their own free will. In the same way, after I had sent a fleet and a land force against the Arabites and the Kinaidokolpites who live across the Red Sea and forced*

*their kings to submit, I commanded them to pay tribute for their land and to go in peace by land and sea and I waged war from Leukē Kōmē to the land of the Sabaeans. 63. I am the first and the only one of my line to have rendered subject all these peoples and for this I gave thanks to the greatest of my gods, to Ares who begat me and who has enabled me to extend my sway over all the peoples neighbouring my country, to the east as far as the Land of Incense, to the west as far as the territories of Ethiopia and Sasū, taking the field and conquering some myself in person, sending my armies against the others. And having brought peace to the whole world under my dominion, I have come down to Adūlis to offer sacrifices to Zeus and Ares, and also to Poseidon for the safety of those who sail on the sea. After mustering my armies and uniting them, I have encamped in this place and have dedicated this throne to Ares in the twenty-seventh year of my reign.*

The majority of the place names and tribal names appearing in the inscription have already been identified by Kirwan,<sup>13)</sup> and since it will be sufficient for our purposes if we have just a general idea of the course taken by the expeditionary forces, here I shall do no more than trace their movements largely on the basis of Kirwan's research.

Firstly, it is to be inferred from the first half of §60 that after having left Adūlis the army climbed to the vicinity of Akkale Guzay in the eastern part of the Eritrean plateau, from where they proceeded across the highlands in a southwesterly direction to the valley of the Takkaze, subjugating various peoples on the way, and, having crossed the river, ascended the Semien mountains. There is, however, no mention of Aksum, which would have been the most important place along this route, and this fact will provide us with an important clue when we later come to consider the identity of the conqueror. The second half of this section describes the activities of the troops that had proceeded northwards, and our attention is drawn in particular to the reference to the subjugation of the *Bega*. These were intrepid Kushitic nomads living in the desert region between Egypt and Ethiopia and between the Red Sea and the Nile Valley who appear in subsequent Arabic literature under the name of 'Beja', and they are thought to be identical with the 'Blemmyes' appearing in classical sources and referred to at the very start of this article.<sup>14)</sup> The statement that the aim of the conquest of these northern peoples was to make 'travel overland feasible along the route leading from the territories of my kingdom as far as Egypt' is extremely important.

The campaigns alluded to in §61 are thought to have been largely directed at the lowlands and coastal regions south of Adūlis as far as northern Somalia. From ancient times Somalia had been renowned, together with Ḥaḍramawt and Dhofār in South Arabia, for its production of frankincense.

The next section describes an expedition to Arabia on the opposite shores of the Red Sea. The *Arabites* may be safely equated with the coastal Bedouins at large, while the *Kinaidokolpites* were a tribe whose name appears already in the second century in Ptolemy's *Geography*,<sup>15)</sup> and they are thought to correspond to the Kināna who occupied the region from Hijāz to Asīr.<sup>16)</sup> However, regardless of

whether or not this identification is correct, it is clear that once it had crossed the Red Sea, the army fought up and down the Red Sea coast of the Arabian Peninsula, ranging from Leukē Kōmē in the north, which many scholars identify with Aynūna near the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba,<sup>17)</sup> to the land of the Sabaeans in the south, and that it attempted to ensure safety of passage by land and sea in this region.

As a result of this series of campaigns, the area over which the king in question held sway extended from 'the Land of Incense' in the east to 'the territories of Ethiopia and Sasū' in the west. Judging from the foregoing sections, 'the Land of Incense' probably corresponds to northern Somalia, but it is not clear to where exactly the phrase 'Ethiopia and Sasū' refers. In Greek the term *Aithiopia* generally refers to that part of northeastern Africa south of Egypt, and during the time when there was a flourishing kingdom of the Kushites, it often referred to this kingdom, but it is unclear whether this interpretation is also applicable in the present instance. As for 'Sasū,' Kirwan suggests that it is a copyist's error and should probably read 'Kasū.'<sup>18)</sup> 'Kasū' corresponds to 'Kush,' and it is generally recognized as referring to the Kushite kingdom centred on Meroë, its inhabitants, and also its territory. The problem here is that (as is also the case with 'Ethiopia') even if the lands of 'Sasū/Kasū' were included in the domains of this king, they are not mentioned in the account of his campaigns quoted above, and if 'Sasū/Kasū' does indeed refer to the kingdom of Meroë, then this will have bearings on various questions relating to the demise of this kingdom (especially the debate over the date of its fall). Be that as it may, following the successful conclusion of this series of campaigns, the king's armies reassembled at Adūlis and held a ceremony to celebrate their victories, and this took place in the twenty-seventh year of the king's reign.

## II. Previous Views on the Authorship of the Inscription

In brief, the inscription on the *Monumentum Adulitanum* may be described as a record of the campaigns and conquests along both shores of the Red Sea and also in their hinterlands that began from Adūlis and ended, probably several years later, with the entire army's remustering again at Adūlis. The events described in the inscription hold considerable significance not only for the history of this region but also for the history of East-West maritime contacts between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. Consequently many researchers have hitherto grappled with various questions relating to this historical source. The first question to have been raised was that of the identity of the person who accomplished these major achievements. Since the inscription records neither the name nor the title of the king in question, the only way to resolve this issue has been to draw inferences from a comparison of historical conditions around the Red Sea with the content of the inscription. A perusal of research history since the nineteenth century reveals that opinion has been broadly divided between the view that he was an Ethiopian

king and the view that he was a South Arabian king, and further differences exist among the proponents of these two theses.<sup>19)</sup>

Let us first consider the thesis that the king in question was an Ethiopian king, which means in effect that he was a king of Aksum. The chief grounds given in support of this thesis may be summarized under the following four points:

1. The style of the monument and the format and content of the inscriptional text resemble the stelae erected in commemoration of the subjugation and pacification of neighbouring tribes by Ezana, a fourth-century Aksumite king.
2. Adūlis, where the monument was erected, was the port of Aksum.
3. It befits a king of Aksum that he should state that he had subjugated the Bega and safeguarded the route leading as far as Egypt.
4. The fact that there is no mention of any confrontation with Aksum, which the route taken by the expeditionary forces would have led one to expect, suggests that the conqueror was himself none other than a king of Aksum.

This thesis has, however, one major drawback in that it is unable to explain satisfactorily why the expeditionary forces should have set out from Adūlis on the shores of the Red Sea rather than from the capital, Aksum, and why they should have also held their victory celebrations at Adūlis. In order to get around this point, it has been suggested that the king in question may have been not a king of Aksum but rather a ruler of the Eritrean coastlands with his base at Adūlis. Although Adūlis may have been suitable as a base of operations, it was, however, too small to serve as the political and economic centre of the lands of a king possessing the strength necessary to carry out major campaigns such as those recorded in the inscription,<sup>20)</sup> and there are moreover no historical sources attesting to the existence of such a powerful political force in Adūlis. In addition, with this theory one is again unable to explain satisfactorily why there is no reference in the inscription to any confrontation with Aksum.

Meanwhile, the chief strength of the view that the king in question came from South Arabia is above all the fact that if the army had been dispatched from the Arabian side of the Red Sea, it would naturally have disembarked at Adūlis, in which case one is able to explain without difficulty both why the campaign started at Adūlis and why the army reassembled there after the conclusion of the campaign. Among current researchers Drewes has been a strong advocate of this theory,<sup>21)</sup> and he has specifically identified the king in question with Shammar Yuhar'ish, who ruled over Ḥimyar from the late third to the early fourth century and succeeded in uniting South Arabia by annexing the two kingdoms of Saba' and Ḥaḍramawt. Drewes reasoned that with the might of this king it would not have been impossible for him to conduct further expeditions as far as Ethiopia and the northern shores of the Red Sea, but an even greater reason for this identification was that the name of the Aksumite king Sembrūthēs, appearing in a

Greek inscription<sup>22)</sup> discovered at Daqqī Mahārī to the north of Asmara, was suggestive of the name of Shammar, king of Ḥimyar. According to Drewes, 'Sembrūthēs' represents the Greek transcription of 'Shammar', who after his unification of South Arabia invaded Ethiopia and established in Aksum a new and powerful dynasty affiliated to Ḥimyar. This means that King Ezana mentioned above was in fact also related to the royal house of Ḥimyar. Moreover, if the *Monumentum Adulitanum* was indeed erected by Shammar, then there is a strong possibility that 'the Land of Incense' given in the inscription as the easternmost extremity of the conqueror's domains corresponds to Ḥaḍramawt rather than to Somalia. Kirwan, who subsequently reexamined the text of the inscription, also generally supports this thesis.<sup>23)</sup>

But during the thirty-odd years since Drewes first put forward the above theory the discovery and publication of new epigraphic material have resulted in major advances in the study of ancient South Arabian history, and this has provided us with more accurate knowledge not only of the power relationships obtaining between the South Arabian kingdoms in the third century but also of relations between Ethiopia and South Arabia. According to this new research,<sup>24)</sup> Aksumite forces began their incursions into South Arabia towards the end of the second century, and these incursions intensified in the next century. At the time there existed in South Arabia the three kingdoms of Saba', Ḥimyar and Ḥaḍramawt, each engaged in continual conflicts and struggles with its rival kingdoms, and the kings of Aksum made skillful use of this political situation, siding sometimes with Saba' and sometimes with Ḥimyar in order to extend their influence. As a result, not only did they come to occupy the regions along the coasts of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and the southern highlands, but they also extended their influence as far as Najrān, an important town on the inland caravan routes. But a decline in their activities in South Arabia is to be observed after the mid-third century, and consequently the prevailing view among researchers of ancient South Arabian history is that the Aksumite forces were driven out of the Arabian Peninsula by Ḥimyar. However, as will be seen in detail in the following section, the fact that Aksum still enjoyed overwhelming strength during this period can be verified from a wide range of sources other than South Arabian inscriptions. Even with the might of Shammar, who had unified South Arabia, it would have been impossible to prevail over Aksum. Moreover, as has also been pointed out by Beeston,<sup>25)</sup> the greater part of his military efforts was expended in conquering the kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt and suppressing subsequent revolts, and he also had to give thought to measures against the Bedouins, who were making incursions from the north. In addition, supposing that the *Monumentum Adulitanum* were attributable to him, then one is again confronted with the earlier question of why there is no mention of Aksum among the lands that he conquered. Thus there are even greater obstacles to this thesis than to that which would ascribe the authorship of the monument to an Aksumite king. According to Beeston,<sup>26)</sup> Drewes himself now recognizes the difficulties in sustaining his Shammar theory.



In addition, a theory ascribing the authorship of the monument to another South Arabian king, this time a king of Ausān in the first century B.C., has been put forward by Beeston,<sup>27)</sup> but since there is even less corroborating evidence for this theory than for the theory of a Ḥimyarite king and it has, moreover, no supporters, I shall omit any detailed discussion of it here.

### III. A New Interpretation of the *Monumentum Adulitanum*

#### 1. The Authorship of the Inscription

Firstly, for the following reasons in addition to the four reasons given earlier, I consider the author of the inscription to have been a king of Aksum in Ethiopia.

In the first place, whereas examples of monumental inscriptions written in Greek, as is the *Monumentum Adulitanum*, are nonexistent in South Arabia, in the case of the kings of Aksum there is the inscription of Sembrūthēs alluded to earlier as well as three inscriptions belonging to Ezana<sup>28)</sup> and three fragments of unknown authorship.<sup>29)</sup> Secondly, it may be noted that while it was not customary in South Arabia to record the year of the king's reign at the end of the inscription, as is the case in the *Monumentum*, in Aksum there is the example of the Sembrūthēs inscription as well as that of a fragment discovered at Meroë.<sup>30)</sup> If the author had been a king of Ḥimyar, then the date would have been indicated not by his regnal year but in accordance with the Ḥimyarite Era.

Thirdly, if one sets aside the colonizing activities undertaken in Ethiopia by the Sabaeans in the first millennium B.C. and the spread of the influence of the united kingdom of Saba' and Ḥimyar to the coasts of Kenya and Tanzania around the start of the first century A.D.,<sup>31)</sup> the kingdoms of South Arabia, especially after the start of the Common Era, were not in any position to cross the Red Sea and conduct military campaigns in Africa. By way of contrast, Aksum, as we have already seen, began its incursions into South Arabia towards the end of the second century, and a wide variety of historical sources, to be considered below, would indicate that it continued to exert influence in this region until after the mid-sixth century. Furthermore, Rome, which had entered a period of Soldier Emperors in the third century, was plunged into confusion by civil wars and also suffered economic decline, withdrawing from the trade with the Indian Ocean, and it can be ascertained from historical sources that as a result of these developments Aksum gained control of the sea route between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and contended with the Sassanids for the profits to be gained from the Indian Ocean trade. In view of these circumstances, it would have been necessary for the kings of Aksum between the third and sixth centuries to conduct campaigns such as those described in the *Monumentum* inscription and to conquer the peoples around the Red Sea so as to safeguard their trade routes, and there is a very strong possibility that they did in fact do so. For the above reasons I consider the *Monumentum* to have been erected by an Aksumite king. But this third point probably requires further explication, and in the following I therefore wish to

discuss it in greater detail.

### 1.1 *Aksumite Rule of South Arabia*

An examination of South Arabian inscriptions referring to Aksum reveals that until about the middle of the third century the kings of Aksum were sending reinforcements to Ḥimyar, which was at war with Saba' and Ḥaḍramawt, but during the reign of the Ḥimyarite king Yāsir Yuhan'im in the latter half of this century the armies of Aksum and Ḥimyar became embroiled in a violent struggle for control of Aden.<sup>32)</sup> This means that the alliance that had continued for several decades between Aksum and Ḥimyar had now collapsed, and surprisingly enough there are no references whatsoever to Aksum in inscriptions from the reign of the next Ḥimyarite king, Shammar Yuhar'ish. This state of affairs continues for more than two hundred years, and during the period up until the reappearance of inscriptions referring to the invasions and rule of Aksum in the sixth century there are scarcely any allusions to Aksum in epigraphic material from South Arabia.

In light of these facts, the majority of researchers of ancient South Arabian history take the view that as part of his undertakings to unify South Arabia Shammar ousted all Aksumite influence from the Arabian Peninsula and achieved complete independence. It defies comprehension, however, that Ḥimyar, which up until then appears to have been only just managing to resist with the help of Aksum the attacks of the Sabaeans, should have suddenly become so powerful. Moreover, as will be seen below, it is known from various sources that the strength of Aksum increased markedly in the third to fourth centuries, and it is difficult to believe that it would have remained ousted from the Arabian Peninsula without making any attempts to regain its command of the sea in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, on which its profits from the trade with the southern seas depended. If we accordingly turn our attention away from contemporary South Arabia and instead examine Aksumite sources from after the mid-third century, as well as the small number of relevant Greek and Latin sources and also later Arabic sources, we find that, contrary to the generally accepted view but in line with my own expectations, Aksumite influence was not ousted from South Arabia and continued to maintain its control there. The main points recorded in these sources are given below.

(1) In the final quarter of the third century Aksum began issuing gold coins engraved with the ruling king's effigy and name, and the majority of Aksumite gold coins issued between the mid-fourth century and early sixth century have been discovered not in Ethiopia but in southern South Arabia. It is considered that the mint itself was probably transferred to this region. Meanwhile, the kingdoms of South Arabia had also been issuing their own coinage until about the second century, but thereafter, even during the reign of Shammar, who succeeded in bringing about a unified kingdom, there was no issue of any independent coinage. When one considers that coins bearing the king's effigy and name would also have served as powerful instruments of political propaganda, the above facts would

suggest that the kings of Ḥimyar were subject to the kings of Aksum.

(2) From the time of the fourth-century Ezana onwards, the long titulature of the kings of Aksum includes the names of Ḥimyar and Saba', thus indicating that the Aksumite kings regarded themselves as the rulers of these two peoples. Those who consider Ḥimyar to have driven Aksum out of South Arabia maintain that the kings of Aksum merely arrogated these royal titles to themselves, but was this in fact so? As a matter of fact, there is no evidence to support the view that Ḥimyar ousted Aksum other than the disappearance of references to Aksum in South Arabian inscriptions, and, as will be explained below, this fact can be interpreted in another way.

(3) The statement by Mānī quoted earlier and dating from shortly after the mid-third century indicates that the influence of contemporary Aksum had spread beyond its original borders and was making major advances to the north and east in particular.

(4) In the fourth century Epiphanius of Constantia (=Salamis), touching on the political situation in the Red Sea region in the second half of the third century, writes as if the peoples of this region, including the Aksumites, Bega and Ḥimyarites, had been unified under a single kingdom.<sup>33)</sup> As was noted earlier, there is virtually no possibility that the unification of this region could have been achieved by anyone other than the kings of Aksum. Mānī and Epiphanius appear to be describing the situation prior to Shammar's accession to the throne, and therefore their testimony cannot serve as direct evidence against the view that Shammar ousted the Aksumites, but they do at least prove that Aksum was exerting overwhelming influence in this region.

(5) In §17 of the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, by an unknown author and thought to date from about the mid-fourth century, there is a passage that would suggest that Arabs exposed to attacks by Persians appealed to Aksum for reinforcement.<sup>34)</sup> Since according to one tradition Shāpūr II of the Sassanids subjugated various Arab tribes in the first half of the fourth century and advanced as far as the vicinity of Medina,<sup>35)</sup> this passage may point to a clash that took place between the Sassanids and either Aksum, which had advanced into the Arabian Peninsula, or some subordinate force.

(6) An edict issued by Constantius II in 356 contains the expression '*ad gentem Axumitarum et Homeritarum*.'<sup>36)</sup> Since *gentem* is in the singular, this has been interpreted to mean that in the mid-fourth century Aksum and Ḥimyar formed a confederation and that, judging from the contemporary situation, it would have been the king of Aksum who had control of this confederation.<sup>37)</sup>

(7) When quoting the letter sent by Constantius II in 356/357 to the Aksumite kings Aizanas (=Ezana) and Sazanas, Athanasios uses the term *tyrannois* to refer to these two rulers.<sup>38)</sup> Meanwhile, the fifth-century Philostorgios, recording the dispatch of Theophilus by the same emperor to Ḥimyar and Aksum for missionary purposes ca. 356, refers to the king of Ḥimyar as *ethnarchēs*.<sup>39)</sup> Even if this does not imply a deliberate differentiation in usage by the same author, the fact that a

distinction was made in the designations of the kings of Aksum and Ḥimyar could perhaps be regarded as a reflection of their respective political status.

(8) Fragment 19 of the *Arabika*<sup>40)</sup> by Uranios, also thought to date from the fourth century, contains a section on 'Abasēnoi' in Arabia in which the author writes, 'after the Sabaeans come the Hadramites, the *Abasēnoi*.'<sup>41)</sup> If this 'Abasēnoi' is a Graecized transcription of the Arabic 'Ḥabasha', this would suggest the possibility that in the fourth century large numbers of Ethiopians were residing to the south or east of Saba', that is, in the region corresponding to South Yemen prior to the unification of two Yemens.

(9) During recent excavations of the ancient port of Qana' in Ḥadramawt by the Soviet-Yemeni Expedition there was discovered Aksumite pottery in an occupation level dating from about the fourth century, while the next level, dating from the fifth to early seventh centuries, yielded large quantities of Ethiopian pottery for everyday use. As a result, it has been conjectured that there was a considerable influx of people from Ethiopia into this region at this time,<sup>42)</sup> and the possibility alluded to in (8) has become even more likely.

(10) The *Periplūs tēs exō thalassēs* by Markianos of Herakleia, thought to have lived in the fourth or fifth century, mentions 'the Himyarites, a tribe of the Ethiopians' (I.18).<sup>43)</sup> This too would suggest that Ḥimyar was at this time subject to Aksum.

(11) *The Martyrium Arethae*,<sup>44)</sup> composed in the first half of the sixth century, is a record of the persecution of Christians at Najrān in 523, and at the end of §1 we find the remarkable statement that the king of Ḥimyar owed tribute to the king of Ethiopia. Although it is unfortunately not clear whether this bespeaks a basic relationship of long standing between the two countries or whether it was restricted only to the period in question, it is nonetheless important evidence of Ḥimyar's subordination to Aksum.

(12) §4 of the same work mentions that at this time a form of currency called *helkas/holkas* was circulating in Ḥimyar, and since this term makes sense only when interpreted as Ethiopian,<sup>45)</sup> it may be assumed that Aksumite currency was circulating in Ḥimyar.

(13) Among the several variants of so-called *The First Letter of Simeon*,<sup>46)</sup> another document dealing with the same persecution, that ascribed to Johannes of Ephesos quotes a letter by the persecutor Dhū Nuwās, king of Ḥimyar, which begins with the following statement: 'The king whom the Kushites (= Aksumites) set up in our land is dead; and the winter season having arrived the Kushites were not able to come across to our land *and set up a Christian king as usual*.'<sup>47)</sup> If what is written here was in fact true, it would provide strong evidence that Ḥimyar had for many years been a dependency of Aksum. However, since the final clause of this passage (italicized above) is not found in any other versions of this text, it may not have been part of Dhū Nuwās's original letter. But even if this should prove to be the case, it still serves to illustrate the fact that to outsiders Ḥimyar gave the appearance of being a dependency of Aksum.

(14) According to medieval Arabic sources recording the historical traditions of

pre-Islamic South Arabia, the kingdom of Ḥimyar was ruled for several centuries from *ca.* A.D. 200 by a powerful new dynasty called the Tubba' dynasty. Past researchers have all failed in their attempts to identify this dynasty with the actual dynasties of Ḥimyar known from contemporary epigraphic material. The period in question coincides with advances by Aksumite forces into South Arabia, where they steadily extended their influence, and a tentative comparison of the names of the kings of the Tubba' dynasty preserved in Arabic with the names of contemporaneous kings and princes of Aksum preserved in Ge'ez has shown that in many cases the former are Arabic translations of the latter.<sup>48)</sup> It would thus appear that many of the rulers of the Tubba' dynasty attested to by later traditions were in fact historical kings or princes of Aksum. This fact would also suggest that for several centuries from the third century onwards Ḥimyar was for the most part a dependency of Aksum.

The points listed above represent reasons why it would seem that Aksum, which began its invasions of South Arabia in the late second century, continued to maintain its influence in this region from the late third century through to the sixth century.

## 1.2 *The Advances of Aksumite Merchants into the Indian Ocean*

Next, I wish to present a number of sources that show that in the third century Aksumite merchants wrested control of the sea route to India via the Red Sea from Roman merchants and vied with Persian and Indian merchants for the profits to be gained from the Indian Ocean trade.

(1) In §7 of a short treatise entitled *Palladiū peri tōn tēs Indias ethnōn kai tōn Bragmanōn* and ascribed to Palladios<sup>49)</sup> the author writes that a *scholastikos* of Thebes who had decided to sail to India travelled from Egypt to Aksum where, after having waited for some length of time, he was eventually able to board an Indian manned ship. In view of the fact that in §4 this *scholastikos* refers to the king of Aksum as *basiliskos mikros tōn Indōn*, it is not clear whether 'Indian' here refers to people originally from India or to Aksumites. Anyway, in order to travel from Egypt to India, it was necessary to transfer to either an Indian or an Aksumite ship at Adūlis, the port of Aksum, and the situation had thus changed considerably from what it had been in the first and second centuries. The only problem is that the date of the sea voyage alluded to here is unclear. If the author of this treatise was indeed Palladios of Helenopolis, then, judging from his birth and death dates, the treatise would have been composed at the start of the fifth century and the journey of the *scholastikos* to India would have taken place some time towards the end of the fourth century.<sup>50)</sup> But the identity of the author is by no means certain, and Desanges allows considerable leeway for the period in question, suggesting any time between *ca.* 360 and the end of the fifth century.<sup>51)</sup>

(2) Kosmas records that an Alexandrian merchant by the name of Sōpatros travelled to Sri Lanka on business together with merchants from Adūlis.<sup>52)</sup> Since

this merchant is said to have died thirty-five years before the composition of *The Christian Topography*, he would have visited Sri Lanka some time around 500. It would thus appear that, as in the foregoing period, it was still necessary at this time to take an Aksumite ship in order to travel from Egypt in the direction of India.

(3) According to Kosmas,<sup>53)</sup> Sri Lanka was at this time the most important link in the trade conducted between the Orient and the Occident. Large numbers of ships came from different parts of India as well as from Persia and Ethiopia, and goods also arrived from China and other countries in the Orient. These goods from the Orient and the products of Sri Lanka are then said to have been exported to Sind, Persia, the land of the Ḥimyarites, and Adūlis. It is thus evident that especially in the western half of the Indian Ocean merchants from Aksum were active alongside Persian and Indian merchants.

(4) According to Prokopios,<sup>54)</sup> Justinian I, who was averse to procuring silk through his enemies the Persians, sent an embassy to the Aksumite king Hellēstheaios (Ella Aṣbeḥā) with the request that Aksumite merchants buy silk from India and then resell it among the Romans. This would indicate that during the first half of the sixth century it was difficult for Byzantium to acquire goods from the Indians without the help of Aksum.

In the above I have quoted at some length sources showing that from the third to sixth centuries Aksumite power prevailed in the regions along the shores of the Red Sea and as far as the Indian Ocean. In light of the contemporary historical circumstances to be inferred from these sources, I consider the author of the *Monumentum Adulitanum* inscription to have been without any doubt a king of Aksum. Next, I wish to present my views on the campaigns undertaken by this Aksumite king.

## **2. A Consideration of the Campaigns**

### **2.1 *The Date of the Campaigns***

As regards the date of the campaigns, I consider it most likely that they took place around the middle of the third century. From the third century through to the sixth century Aksum witnessed the development of its power, and this contrasted with Egypt, which had for many years controlled the Red Sea but whose strength declined for a time from the third century onwards owing to civil wars within the Roman Empire. This provided Aksum with an opportunity to seize hegemony over the Red Sea region and also the sea route to India, and Aksum's advances into South Arabia, to be observed from the late second century, were its first step in this direction. Meanwhile, when one also takes into account the religious situation in Aksum, it is highly improbable that these campaigns would have taken place later than the mid-fourth century. This is because during the reign of Ezana in the second quarter of the fourth century the kings of Aksum converted to Christianity, and any ceremonies in which sacrifices were offered to

pagan gods such as Zeus, Poseidon and Ares, as is recorded in the inscription, would presumably have been conducted prior to this. That being so, there are four reasons why I consider the campaigns to have taken place specifically in the mid-third century.

Firstly, as was pointed out in the Preamble, the incursions into Roman Egypt by the Blemmyes that began around the middle of the third century appear to have been triggered by Aksum's push from the south. Secondly, the words of Mānī quoted earlier and attributable to shortly after the mid-third century would suggest that Aksum had experienced major growth prior to this period. Thirdly, among South Arabian inscriptions similarly dating from shortly after the mid-third century there are some that record that the Aksumite army was accompanied by a group referred to by the unusual term *b'ḅ'ṯ*,<sup>55)</sup> and it would appear that this group was composed of some of the Bega/Blemmyes who had surrendered to the Aksumites and had then been transferred to Arabia, where they had been committed to the struggle against Ḥimyar.<sup>56)</sup> This means that the northward advance by the Aksumite army and its subjugation of the Bega would no doubt have taken place a little earlier than this. Lastly, medieval Arabic sources record a legend describing a major campaign that was directed from South Arabia towards the surrounding lands in the early or mid-third century, and it is to be surmised that it was the author of the *Monumentum* inscription who served as the historical model for the hero who conducted this campaign. I shall return to this final point in the Conclusion.

## 2.2 *The Aim and Significance of the Campaigns*

Under what circumstances, then, and for what purpose were the campaigns described in the *Monumentum* inscription conducted? The Aksumite army, which during the third century advanced as far as the highlands of South Arabia, established its main base at the town of Sawā to the south of Ta'izz, and it is to be surmised that the Aksumite king himself or one of his sons resided here and directed operations in South Arabia. This advance into South Arabia by Aksum appears not to have been just a military occupation, but to have also involved colonization and to have been of a semipermanent nature. At all events, during this protracted war lasting several decades the kings and princes of Aksum would have often remained stationed on the Arabian side of the Red Sea, and it is quite conceivable that during their frequent absences from their homeland the African peoples who had been subject to Aksum rose one after another in revolt. In such circumstances, could it not be assumed that the king of Aksum would then have temporarily suspended operations in South Arabia, mustered his forces, and returned to Africa, where he established his headquarters at Adulis, the point of disembarkation, and from this base suppressed the revolts that had broken out in different parts of his realm? And could not the series of campaigns recorded in the *Monumentum* inscription have been carried out by this same king, availing himself of the momentum gained during the suppression of the revolts, with the aim of

gaining control of the maritime and overland trade routes in the Red Sea and its hinterlands and securing peace and order along these trade routes? The entire army would then have assembled at Adulis after the conclusion of these operations presumably in order to sail back to South Arabia and resume the interrupted hostilities there.

Upon their return to South Arabia, the Aksumites would probably have been met with the defection of Ḥimyar, their longtime ally. During the several years in which the Aksumite forces had been absent from South Arabia and waging wars along both sides of the Red Sea, a political coup may have taken place in Ḥimyar and an anti-Aksumite faction, represented by Yāsir Yuhan'im, may have seized power and joined forces with Saba'. But during the rule of his successor, Shammar, references to Aksum disappear from the epigraphic material, and many researchers of ancient South Arabian history regard this as proof that Ḥimyar drove the Aksumites out of South Arabia. However, as was seen above, a wide range of historical sources indicates that Aksum continued to exercise strong influence in South Arabia even after this time. That being so, why do the South Arabian inscriptions practically cease mentioning Aksum and Ḥabasha from the time of Shammar onwards?

In my view, what may have happened is that at the very start of Shammar's reign some sort of peace accord may have been concluded between Ḥimyar and Aksum, and because this was essentially adhered to for a long time thereafter, no major clashes occurred between the two countries up until the sixth century. The relationship between the two countries as laid down in the accord would not have been one of equals, and it is to be inferred from the sources cited earlier that the king of Ḥimyar was placed in a position subordinate to that of the king of Aksum and was probably obligated to pay tribute to him. Shammar accepted an unequal accord of this nature presumably because his struggle with Aksum was of less importance to him than that with Ḥaḍramawt. As far as can be judged from the epigraphic material, the greater part of his military efforts was devoted to the conquest of the kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt and the suppression of subsequent revolts. Nor can one overlook the fact that from this time up until the sixth century the kings of Ḥimyar were largely preoccupied with the lands to the north. In view of the fact that the famous epitaph of Imru' al-Qays discovered at al-Namāra in Syria<sup>57)</sup> records that he made a foray as far as Najrān, which was under the rule of Shammar, there can be no doubt that for Ḥimyar at this time the question of how to deal with the threat from the north was an issue of great urgency. Shammar's dispatch of an embassy to Ktesiphon and Seleukeia, recorded in the contemporaneous inscription Sh 31,<sup>58)</sup> may possibly have been a diplomatic move to resolve this crisis. By the fourth century Ḥimyar's policy towards the north had changed to the offensive, and up until the sixth century we find numerous references to forays made by the armies of Ḥimyar and its tribal allies deep into the interior of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>59)</sup>

Meanwhile Aksum, as is recorded in Ezana's inscriptions, was waging wars in



Africa with neighbouring peoples. It is to be surmised that its rule also extended as far as South Arabia, but, as may be inferred from the *Monumentum* inscription, so long as the peoples under its rule were not remiss in paying tribute, nonintervention in their internal affairs was the governing principle of Aksumite rule. In brief, it would appear that Ḥimyar and Aksum, utilizing the reserves of strength that resulted from the realization of peace between the two countries, each strove for some time afterwards to maintain or extend their spheres of influence. This is how I interpret the fact that for more than two hundred years after the end of the third century there are scarcely any references to Aksum or Ḥabasha in South Arabian inscriptions.

At any rate, after having pacified the borders of the Red Sea and the adjoining regions during the above campaigns, Aksum also extended the sphere of its rule by establishing its hegemony over the sea routes to India, and as a result it even came to be viewed by contemporaries as a major power comparable with Persia and Rome. The *Monumentum Adulitanum*, which records these wars of conquest, would no doubt have represented for Aksum a veritable monument to its glory.

### Conclusion

The illustrious exploits of the author of the *Monumentum Adulitanum* inscription inevitably call to mind the exploits of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, the hero of the South Arabian version of the so-called Alexander Romances. The most coherent account of this legend is to be found in Ibn Hishām's *Kitāb al-tijān fī mulūk ḥimyar*, as transmitted from Wahb b. Munabbih.<sup>60</sup> Dhu'l-Qarnayn was the son of al-Ḥārith, who founded the semilegendary dynasty of Tubba' in Ḥimyar, and after having succeeded his father to the throne, he followed divine instructions received in a dream and set out on a major campaign (details of which must be omitted here for want of space). Because the plot of this legend resembles that of the Alexander Romances, and also because the name Dhu'l-Qarnayn is, along with Iskandar, the Arabic equivalent of Alexander, this legend is, as was noted above, regarded as an adaptation of the Alexander Romance. A distinctive feature of this particular version, however, not found in any other versions, is that the hero Dhu'l-Qarnayn is presented as the king of Ḥimyar in South Arabia.

Among the legends relating to the Tubba' dynasty, there are quite a number that represent distortions of historical events that actually occurred in Ḥimyar and other parts of South Arabia, and when considered in conjunction with contemporary epigraphic sources, they can often serve as extremely useful research material. This legend of Dhu'l-Qarnayn is one such example, and it is even possible to specify the period in which he was active, with his reign coinciding with the early to mid-third century. It was probably because there actually was a conqueror-king suggestive of the hero of the Alexander Romances in South Arabia at this time that there evolved an adaptation in which a hero modelled on this historical king acts in accordance with the plot of the romance, and I believe that

no one other than the author of the *Monumentum* inscription could have served as the historical model of Dhu'l-Qarnayn. It is of course to be anticipated that this suggestion will be met with the counterargument that Tubba' Dhu'l-Qarnayn was a king of Ḥimyar and not of Aksum. But as was hinted at earlier, in my view the Tubba' dynasty is not a legendary adaptation of an actual Ḥimyarite dynasty, but is an expression, in the form of a fictitious genealogy, of the convoluted political relationship obtaining between Ḥimyar and Aksum in South Arabia after the third century. In other words, among the kings designated as Tubba' there were included kings of Aksum who waged wars of conquest in South Arabia or those who made Ḥimyar recognize their suzerainty, and Dhu'l-Qarnayn may be described as a prime example of such a king.

Finally, in bringing this article to a close, I wish to present a hypothesis concerning the actual name of the Aksumite king in question. The Ethiopian name of this king was probably Aṣbeḥā, and it is to be surmised that he was identical to the king of Aksum called 'DhBH in the Sabaic inscription Ja 576 dating from the first half of the third century.<sup>61)</sup> By a curious coincidence his name was thus the same as that of the king who ordered a copy to be made of the *Monumentum* inscription. It was for this reason that the latter may have been all the more eager to obtain prior to his Arabian campaign a copy of this historical document demonstrating the legitimacy of his rule over Arabia.<sup>62)</sup>

### Abbreviations

ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> , edited by W. Haase and H. Temporini (Berlin and New York).
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i> .
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> .
DAE	E. Littmann, <i>Deutsche Aksum-Expedition. IV-Sabäische, Griechische und Altabessinische Inschriften</i> (Berlin, 1913).
GJ	<i>The Geographical Journal</i> .
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i> .
MAFRAY	Mission archéologique française en République arabe du Yémen.
PG	J. P. Migne, <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca</i> .
PSAS	<i>Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies</i> .
RIE	E. Bernand, A. J. Drewes, and R. Schneider, <i>Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumites et axoumites</i> (Paris, 1991).

### Notes

- 1) These incursions are said to have begun during the reign of Decius (249–251): J. Desanges, *Recherches sur l'activité des Méditerranéens aux confins de l'Afrique* (Rome, 1978), p. 341; *id.*, "Les relations de l'Empire romain avec l'Afrique nilotique et érythréenne, d'Auguste à Probus,"

- ANRW*, II.10.1 (1988), p. 33; R. T. Updegraff, *A Study of the Blemmyes*, Ph.D. thesis (Brandeis University, 1978), p. 47; *id.*, "The Blemmyes I: The Rise of the Blemmyes and the Roman Withdrawal from Nubia under Diocletian," *ANRW*, II.10.1, p. 69.
- 2) J. Lesquier, *L'armée romaine d'Égypte d'Auguste à Dioclétien* (Le Caire, 1918), p. 34; E. Cerulli, "Punti di vista sulla storia dell' Etiopia," *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Etiopici (Roma, 2-4 aprile 1959)* (Rome, 1960), pp. 16-17; A. J. Drewes, *Inscriptions de l'Éthiopie antique* (Leiden, 1962), p. 102; Desanges, *Recherches*, p. 348; *id.*, "Les relations," p. 40.
  - 3) The opening passage of Chap. 77 of a Coptic manuscript discovered at Fayyūm in Egypt: C. Schmidt (ed.), *Manichäische Handschriften der staatlichen Museen Berlin, I: Kephalaia* (Stuttgart, 1940), pp. 188-189 (ed. and tr. by A. Böhlig). Cf. I. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (Leiden, 1995), p. 197.
  - 4) Cf. W. Hahn, "Münzprägung des axumitischen Reiches," *Litterae Numismaticae Vindobonenses*, 2 (1983), pp. 113-180 and plates 12-15; S. C. Munro-Hay, *The Coinage of Aksum* (New Delhi and Glastonbury, 1984); *id.*, *Aksum: An African Civilization of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 180-195. Hahn considers the issue of Aksum's gold coinage to have begun *ca.* A.D. 300, but this seems rather improbable since it would mean that four kings reigned during the first three decades of the fourth century. I follow the view of Munro-Hay, who dates the first issue of gold coins to about 270 or a little later.
  - 5) R. Schneider, "Les origines de l'écriture éthiopienne," S. Segert and A. J. E. Bodrogligeti (eds.), *Ethiopian Studies, Dedicated to Wolf Leslau on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday . . .* (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 414-416.
  - 6) Cf. K. P. Kirwan, "The Christian Topography and the Kingdom of Aksum," *GJ*, 138-2 (1972), p. 168; F. Anfray, "Deux villes axoumites: Adoulis et Matara," *IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici (Roma, 10-15 aprile 1972)* (Rome, 1974), p. 749.
  - 7) Cosmas Indicopleustēs, *Topographie chrétienne*, ed. and tr. by W. Wolska-Conus, 3 vols. (Paris, 1968-1973).
  - 8) *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 368-369: II.56.
  - 9) This was Ella Aṣbeḥā's first expedition to Ḥimyar, and his forces would have set out probably no later than September 518: Y. Shitomi, "La persécution de Naḡrān: réexamen des dates figurant dans le *Martyrium Arethae*," *ORIENT*, 24 (1988), pp. 71-83.
  - 10) *Topographie chrétienne*, 1, p. 367.
  - 11) Cf. A. F. L. Beeston, "The Authorship of the Adulis Throne Text," *BSOAS*, 43 (1980), p. 453.
  - 12) *Topographie chrétienne*, 1, pp. 372-379: II.60-63. Cf. Kirwan, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.
  - 13) *Ibid.*, pp. 173-175.
  - 14) The question of the identity of 'Beja' and 'Blemmyes' has been largely resolved through the publication of a letter sent in autumn 758 from the governor-general of Egypt to the king of Nubia and unearthed in 1972 at Qaṣr Ibrīm in Egyptian Nubia, for in the Coptic translation of this Arabic letter 'Beja' has been rendered as 'Blemmyes': J. M. Plumley, "An Eighth-Century Arabic Letter to the King of Nubia," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 61 (1975), p. 245. Cf. Updegraff, *A Study of the Blemmyes*, pp. 156-159.
  - 15) VI.7.5; 7.20; 7.23.
  - 16) Kirwan bases himself on H. von Wissmann, but this view already appears in a nineteenth-century study by A. Sprenger: *Die alte Geographie Arabiens als Grundlage der Entwicklungsgeschichte des Semitismus* (Bern, 1875), pp. 31-32.
  - 17) Cf. K. P. Kirwan, "A Roman Shipmaster's Handbook," *GJ*, 147-1 (1981), p. 83; *id.*, "Where to Search for the Ancient Port of Leuke Kome," *Studies in the History of Arabia*, II (Riyadh, 1984), pp. 55-61.
  - 18) This hypothesis had already been put forward by E. Glaser in the late nineteenth century: Drewes, *op. cit.*, p. 104, n. 1.
  - 19) On the chief theories put forward up until the mid-twentieth century, see *ibid.*, pp. 103-104. Theories proposed since then are examined in the present article.
  - 20) Cf. K. P. Kirwan, "The Arabian Background to One of the 'Cosmas' Inscriptions from Adulis

- (Ethiopia),” *Studies in the History of Arabia*, I-1 (Riyadh, 1979), p. 95.
- 21) Drewes, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.
- 22) DAE 3 (=RIE 275). Since it is a short inscription, a translation of the entire text may be given here: “King of kings of the Aksumites, great Sembrūthēs came (and) erected (this monument) in the year 24 of Sembrūthēs the Great King.” This is an important piece of historical material both in that among the Aksumite kings whose names are known to us the author Sembrūthēs is the first to assume the title of ‘King of kings of the Aksumites’ and to be also called ‘Great King’ and in that it records the year of his reign.
- 23) Kirwan, “*The Christian Topography*,” p. 175; *id.*, “The Arabian Background,” p. 93.
- 24) Cf. Ch. Robin, “La première intervention abyssine en Arabie méridionale (de 200 à 270 de l’ère chrétienne environ),” *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (University of Addis Ababa, 1984)*, II (Addis Ababa, 1989), pp. 147-162; Shitomi Yūzō 都勇造, “Kodai Minami Arabia hibun ni arawareru Abishiniajin” 「古代南アラビア碑文に現れるアビシニア人」 (Abyssinians in the ancient South Arabian inscriptions), *Nihon Oriento Gakkai sōritsu sanjūshūnen kinen Orientogaku ronshū* 『日本オリエント學會創立三十周年記念オリエント學論集』 (Collected papers on Near Eastern studies in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan; Tokyo, 1984), pp. 279-295; *id.*, “Kodai Minami Arabia hibun ni arawareru Abishiniajin (2)” 「古代南アラビア碑文に現れるアビシニア人 (二)」 (Abyssinians in the ancient South Arabian inscriptions [2]), *Nihon Oriento Gakkai sōritsu sanjūgoshūnen kinen Orientogaku ronshū* 『日本オリエント學會創立三十五周年記念オリエント學論集』 (Collected papers on Near Eastern studies in commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan; Tokyo, 1990), pp. 193-213.
- 25) Beeston, *op. cit.*, pp. 453-454.
- 26) *Ibid.*, p. 453.
- 27) *Ibid.*, pp. 453-458.
- 28) DAE 4 (=RIE 270); RIE 270bis, 271.
- 29) DAE 2 (=RIE 269), discovered at Abbā Paṅtalēōn near Aksum, and RIE 286 and 286A, discovered at Meroë.
- 30) RIE 286. The importance of this inscription lies in the fact that it was inscribed on a stela erected at Meroë by the ‘[King of the Aksu]mites and the Himyarites’ and records the year of the king’s reign (‘21 [or 24]’) at the end of the inscription. Because this regnal year is close to that of Sembrūthēs and that recorded in the *Monumentum* inscription, there has naturally been some discussion of the relationship between them, but nothing definite is yet known.
- 31) *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, ed. and tr. by L. Casson (Princeton, 1989), pp. 60-61: §16.
- 32) MAFRAY-al-Mi’sāl 5, 6: M. A. Bāfaqīh, “Muḥtaway naqsh al-Mi’sāl 5,” *Raydān*, 6 (1994), pp. 57-77 (in Arabic); *id.*, “Al-Mi’sāl 6,” *ibid.*, pp. 78-88 (in Arabic).
- 33) *Libri de XII gemmis*, §243: PG, 43, col. 329-330=CSEL, 35, *Epistulae*, Part 2, pp. 748-749. Cf. Desanges, *Recherches*, pp. 346-347.
- 34) *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, ed. and tr. by J. Rougé (Paris, 1966), pp. 152-153. Cf. J. Desanges, “Une mention altérée d’Axoum dans l’*Expositio totius mundi et gentium*,” *Annales d’Éthiopie*, 7 (1967), p. 149.
- 35) Cf. Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Graz, 1973; 1st ed.: Leyden, 1879), p. 56.
- 36) *Cod. Theod.*, XII.12.2: Th. Mommsen and P. M. Meyer (eds.), *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis*, I-2 (Berlin, 1905), p. 726.
- 37) Desanges, *Recherches*, p. 358, n. 303; I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, D. C., 1984), p. 42.
- 38) Athanase d’Alexandrie, *Apologie à l’Empereur Constance: apologie pour sa fuite*, ed. and tr. by Jan-M. Szymusiak (Paris, 1958), p. 124.
- 39) Philostorgius, *Kirchengeschichte*, ed. by J. Bidez (Leipzig, 1913), p. 34.
- 40) F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, III.C.1 (Leiden, 1958), pp. 339-344: No. 675 URANIOS. Cf. J. M. I. West, *Uranios*, Ph.D. thesis (Harvard University, 1973).

- 41) Jacoby, *op. cit.*, p. 342.
- 42) A. V. Sedov, "New Archaeological and Epigraphical Material from Qana (South Arabia)," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 3 (1992), pp. 127–128.
- 43) C. Müller, *Geographi graeci minores*, I (Hildesheim, 1965; 1st ed.: Paris, 1855), p. 527.
- 44) *Acta Sanctorum*, October, X (Paris and Rome, 1869), pp. 721–759 (ed. by E. Carpentier).
- 45) Cf. J. Ryckmans, *La persécution des chrétiens himyarites au sixième siècle* (Istanbul, 1956), p. 5, n. 21.
- 46) I. Guidi, "La lettera di Simeone vescovo di Bêth-Arsâm sopra i martiri omeriti," *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei*, serie 3a: *Memorie della Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, VII (Rome, 1881), pp. 471–515. Contrary to general opinion, this document is not the work of Simeon, but would appear to be a type of martyrology that was later compiled by some other person on the basis of his two letters: Y. Shitomi, "Réexamen des deux lettres attribuées à Siméon de Bêth-Arsâm, relatives à la persécution de Nağrân," *Études sud-arabes: Recueil offert à Jacques Ryckmans* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1991), pp. 207–224.
- 47) I.-B. Chabot, *Incerti auctoris Chronicon anonymum pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, II: *Accedunt Iohannis Ephesini fragmenta*, curante E. W. Brooks (Louvain, 1952; 1st ed.: Paris, 1933), p. 58.
- 48) I intend to devote a separate article to this subject.
- 49) J. D. M. Derrett, "The History of 'Palladius on the Races of India and the Brahmins,'" *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 21 (1960), pp. 64–135; W. Berghoff (ed.), *Palladius de gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1967).
- 50) Cf. *ibid.*, p. 16.
- 51) Desanges, "D'Axoum à l'Assam," p. 631.
- 52) *Topographie chrétienne*, 3, pp. 348–349: XI.17.
- 53) *Ibid.*, pp. 344–347: XI.15.
- 54) Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, I, ed. and tr. by H. B. Dewing (London, 1914), pp. 192–193: I.xx.9–12.
- 55) MAFRAY-al-Mi'sâl 3, 5, 6.
- 56) According to R. Blachère *et al.*, *Dictionnaire arabe-français-anglais*, in Arabic *b'b'* means 'poor luckless wight, vagabond; boggy-man,' but it is to be surmised that, like *Barbaroi*, *Blemmyes*, *Bega* and *Beja*, it was originally an onomatopoeic word meaning 'to speak a strange language.' I shall leave for another occasion a discussion of my grounds for identifying the *b'b'* appearing in South Arabian inscriptions with the *Bega*, and for the present I merely offer this as a tentative hypothesis.
- 57) There are many studies dealing with this epitaph, but among the more recent see: J. A. Bellamy, "A New Reading of the Namārah Inscription," *JAOS*, 105 (1985), pp. 31–51; M. Kropp, "Vassal—neither of Rome nor of Persia. Mar'-al-Qays the Great King of the Arabs," *PSAS*, 23 (1993), pp. 63–93.
- 58) Cf. W. W. Müller, "Eine sabäische Gesandtschaft in Ktesiphon und Seleukeia," in R. Degen, W. W. Müller, and W. Röllig, *Neue Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik*, II (Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 155–165.
- 59) The following inscriptions record Himyarite forays into central Arabia: 'Abadān I, dated 470 in the Himyarite Era (=A.D. 360); Ry 509, dating from the time of King Abūkarib As'ad at the start of the fifth century; Ry 510, bearing a date corresponding to A.D. 521; and Ry 506, bearing a date corresponding to A.D. 552/553.
- 60) Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik b. Hishām, *Kitāb al-tījān fī mulūk ḥimyar 'an Wabb b. Munabbih* (Haydarabad, 1347h./1928–1929m). Cf. M. Lidzbarski, "Zu den arabischen Alexandergeschichten," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete*, 8 (1893), pp. 263–312; F. Krenkow, "The Two Oldest Books on Arabic Folklore," *Islamic Culture*, 2 (1928), pp. 55–89, 204–236; T. Nagel, *Alexander der Große in der frühislamischen Volksliteratur* (Walldorf-Hessen, 1978).
- 61) Cf. Shitomi Yūzō, "Zen-Isuramuki no Minami Arabia ni kansuru mittsu no eiyū densetsu—Soromon, Arekusandorosu, Kai-Kāūsū" 「前イスラム期の南アラビアに関する三つの英雄傳説—ソロモン、アレクサンドロス、カイ・カーウス」 (Three heroic legends concerning pre-Islamic South Arabia: Solomon, Alexander and Kay-Kāūs), *Nihon Chūtō Gakkai Nenpō* 『日本中東

學會年報』(Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies), 5 (1990), pp. 34–35. The relevant section is translated below:

Kings whose names might be related either phonetically or semantically to the name Dhu'l-Qarnayn, which is usually interpreted to mean 'the two-horned', cannot be found in the epigraphic material. Similarly, there do not exist any Ḥimyarite kings whose achievements might allow us to identify them with the legendary Dhu'l-Qarnayn. But what happens if we change our perspective and compare his name with the names of Ethiopian kings? In not only Arabic, but also other Semitic languages, the root *qm* means, in addition to 'horn', also 'ray', especially 'the first ray of the rising sun', and therefore Dhu'l-Qarnayn can also mean 'the master of the two rays of the sun'. Meanwhile, the name of the Ethiopian king Aṣṣbeḥā has the similar meaning 'He brought the dawn'. Now, in the Sabaic inscription Ja 576 dating from the first half of the third century there appears an Aksumite king bearing the name 'DhBH, and this can be interpreted as a Sabaic transcription of Aṣṣbeḥā. This means that the commander-in-chief of the Aksumite forces then stationed in South Arabia was a king by the name of Aṣṣbeḥā. Chronologically speaking, there is a very strong possibility that this king was the author of the *Monumentum* inscription. That being so, is it not conceivable that the name of this Aṣṣbeḥā, meaning 'He brought the dawn', blended with Dhu'l-Qarnayn, an epithet of Alexander the Great, and that the latter (Dhu'l-Qarnayn) was also used as the Arabic name of the former (Aṣṣbeḥā)? As was noted earlier, it is possible to point to further examples apart from this in which the names of kings of the Tubba' dynasty are in fact Arabic translations of the names of contemporary Aksumite kings. The main cause of the confusion that arose in the traditions surrounding Alexander and Aṣṣbeḥā was probably the fact that Alexander's epithet became identical to Aṣṣbeḥā's Arabic name. For the above reasons I am of the view that, if one wishes to seek a historical model for the South Arabian Dhu'l-Qarnayn, it would be the Aksumite king Aṣṣbeḥā, appearing in Sabaic inscriptions as 'DhBH, and that he was a great ruler who, because he carried out the major campaigns recorded in the *Monumentum*, was compared even to Alexander by people of later times.

- 62) Cf. S. Smith, "Events in Arabia in the 6th Century A.D.," *BSOAS*, 16 (1957), p. 455. Smith conjectures that it was perhaps because Ella Aṣṣbeḥā sought in the text of this inscription a historical basis for his own rule over South Arabia that he ordered a copy of the inscription to be made while he was busy with preparations for the campaign.