

West meets East: At the Borders of the *Oikoumenē* and Beyond

Lecture 16 – East Africa and the Graeco-Roman World

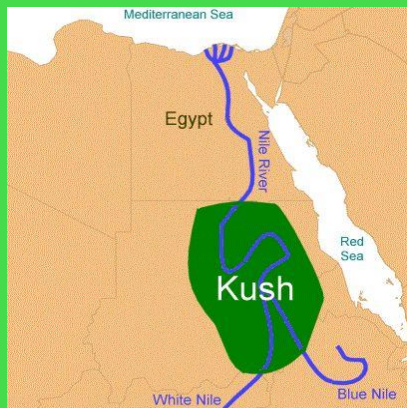
CLAH6007

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Early Greek Interaction with Meroë

- Greek mercenaries who served in the army of Psammetichus II (595-589 BC) - Psamtik II – graffiti on Colossi of Ramses II at Abu Simbel.
 - Guarding the southern border of Egypt – Alexander, soldiers at Elephantine.
 - Alexander and an Ethiopian campaign? – argued by Burstein (1976).
- “[Alexander] sent Apollonides and the Chians under strict guard to Elephantine in Egypt.” – **Arrian *Anab.* 3.2.7.**

“As he [Alexander] was travelling down to Babylon [324 BC]... envoys seeking friendly relations arrived from the Ethiopians...” – **7.15.4.**



The Ptolemies and the Kingdom of Meroë

“For a war against the Ethiopians Ptolemy recruited 500 cavalrymen from Greece.” – **Agatharchides 1.20 = Photius Cod.250.20, 445b.**

- Theocritus and Callixenus on the procession in Alexandria.
- Names Pasimenes and Iason engraved on temple at Buhen
- Ptolemy V (204-181 BC) and revolt in the south – temporary extension of control of second cataract under Ptolemy VI.

“For from earliest times until Ptolemy who was called Philadelphus, not only did no Greeks ever cross over into Ethiopia, but none ascended even as far as the boundaries of Egypt — to such an extent were all these regions inhospitable to foreigners and altogether dangerous; but after this king had made an expedition into Ethiopia with an army of Greeks, being the first to do so, the facts about that country from that time forth have been more accurately learned.” – **Diodorus Siculus 1.37.5.**

“Of all their customs the most amazing is that which obtains in connection with the death of their kings. For **the priests at Meroë** who spend their time in the worship of the gods and the rites which do them honour, being the greatest and most powerful order, **whenever the idea comes to them, dispatch a messenger to the king with orders that he die.** For the gods, they add, have revealed this to them, and it must be that the command of the immortals should in no wise be disregarded by one of mortal frame. And this order they accompany with other arguments, such as are accepted by a simple minded nature, which has been bred in a custom that is both ancient and difficult to eradicate and which knows no argument that can set in opposition to commands enforced by no compulsion. Now in former times the kings would obey the priests, having been overcome, not by arms nor by force, but because their reasoning powers had been put under a constraint by their very superstition; **but during the reign of the second Ptolemy the king of the Ethiopians, Ergamenes [Arakamani?] , who had had a Greek education and had studied philosophy, was the first to have the courage to disdain the command.** For assuming a spirit which became the position of a king he entered with his soldiers into the remote place where stood, as it turned out, the golden shrine of the Ethiopians, put the priests to the sword, and after abolishing this custom thereafter ordered affairs as he saw fit.” – **Diod. 3.6.**

The Romans and the Kingdom of Meroë

- Cornelius Gallus the first governor of Egypt (30-26 BC) was confronted with a revolt in the Thebiad.
- Portion of troops from the Triakontaschoinos withdrawn for Aelius Gallus' (26-24 BC) Arabian campaign [schoinos = c.40 stades].
- Capture of Syene, Elephantine and Philae.
- Gaius Petronius (24-21 BC) launches two Ethiopian campaigns in 24 BC and a second ending in 22 BC.



“The whole of this country has successively had the names of Aetheria, Atlantia, and last of all, Aethiopia, from Aethiops, the son of Vulcan. It is not at all surprising that towards the extremity of this region the men and animals assume a monstrous form, when we consider **the changeableness and volubility of fire, the heat of which is the great agent in imparting various forms and shapes to bodies**. Indeed, it is reported that in the interior, on the eastern side, there is **a people that have no noses**, the whole face presenting a plane surface; that **others again are destitute of the upper lip**, and **others are without tongues**. Others again, **have the mouth grown together, and being destitute of nostrils**, breathe through one passage only, imbibing their drink through it by means of the hollow stalk of the oat, which there grows spontaneously and supplies them with its grain for food. **Some of these nations have to employ gestures by nodding the head and moving the limbs, instead of speech**. Others again were **unacquainted with the use of fire before the time of Ptolemy [IX] Lathyrus**, king of Egypt. Some writers have also stated that there is a nation of Pygmies, which dwells among the marshes in which the river Nile takes its rise; while on the coast of, Aethiopia, where we paused, there is a range of mountains, of a red colour, which have the appearance of being always burning.” – **Pliny NH 6.35.135 ff.**

Later Contact

- Maintenance of diplomatic contact.
- A Greek graffito from Philae records a visit in AD 260 by Abratoi, the son of the Ethiopian king.
- A Greek inscription of 13 BC records a Meroitic mission of a certain Harpocras, who passed through Pselchis on his way up-country
- Latin inscription at Musawwarat (Sudan) - a pilgrimage to commune with Isis or a delegate of a Meroitic queen to Rome?



“Nero, though angry at him, did not sail against him, nor yet against the Ethiopians or the Caspian Gates, as he had intended. He did, indeed, among other things, send spies to both places, but seeing that the subjugation of these regions demanded time and labour, he hoped that they would submit to him of their own accord.” – **Dio Cassius 63.8.1-2.**

“These are the names of places given as far as Meroë: but at the present day hardly any of them on either side of the river are in existence; at all events, the praetorian troops that were sent by the Emperor Nero under the command of a tribune, for the purposes of enquiry, when, among his other wars, he was contemplating an expedition against Ethiopia, brought back word that they had met with nothing but deserts on their route.” – **Pliny NH 6.35.181.**

“I have myself heard from their own lips the story told by the two non-commissioned officers sent to investigate the sources of the Nile by our good Emperor Nero, a monarch devoted to virtue in every form, but especially solicitous for the interests of truth. The King of Ethiopia had supplied them with assistance and furnished letters of introduction to the neighbouring kings, and so they had penetrated into the heart of Africa and accomplished a long journey.” – **Seneca Natural Questions 6.8.3.**

Ethiopians in the Roman Army?

- Ethiopian *numeri* in the Roman army?

“...an Ethiopian soldier, who was famous among buffoons and always a notable jester, met him with a garland of cypress-boughs. And when Severus in a rage ordered that the man be removed from his sight, troubled as he was by the man's ominous colour and the ominous nature of the garland, the Ethiopian by way of jest cried, it is said, "You have been all things, you have conquered all things, now, O conqueror, be a god.” - ***SHA Severus 22.4-5.***



Rise of the Blemmyes

- Blemmyes repeatedly invade Egypt between the middle of the third century to the late sixth century AD.
- Capture of Koptos and Ptolemais – recapture by Probus (AD 276-282).
- Diocletian ceding territory (Dodekaschoinos) to the Nobades to create buffer zone (c.120 km).



“Then it was that the emperor [Diocletian] decreed to them [Nobades] and the Blemmyes a fixed sum of gold should be given every year with the stipulation that they no longer plunder the Romans.” – **Procopius *History of the Wars* 1.19.32.**

Adulis and Axum

Zôskalês the King of Barbaria

“After about 800 stades [from Adulis] comes another, very deep, bay near whose mouth, on the right, a great amount of sand has accumulated; under this, deeply buried obsidian is found, a natural local creation in that spot alone. The ruler of these regions, from the Moschophagoi [eaters of roots and stalks] to the rest of Barbaria, is Zôskalês, a stickler about his possessions and always holding out for getting more, but in other respects a fine person and well versed in reading and writing Greek.” – **PME 5.**

- *Azomitorum cum (A)dulitibus* – “the Axumites along with the Adulitans” – **Epiphanius of Constantia**
Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 35.

The Town of Adulis

- Indications of importance in late Antique period.

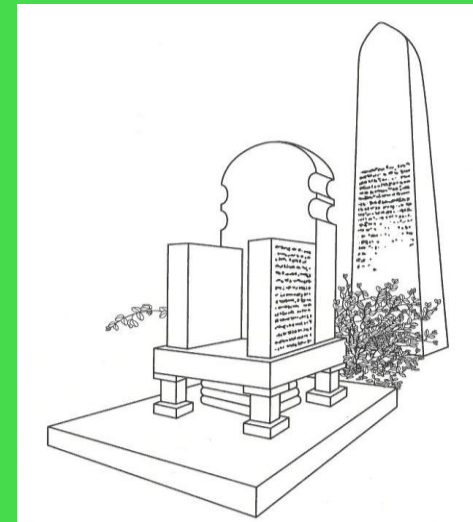
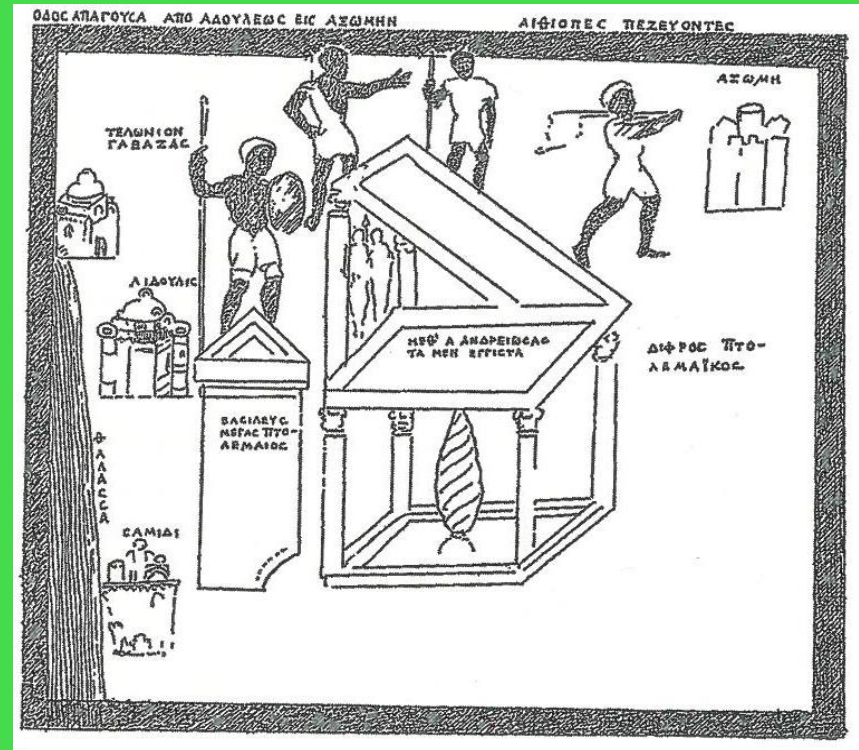
“About 3000 stades beyond Ptolemaïs of the Hunts is the legal emporium of Adulis. It is on a deep bay extending due south, **in front of which lies an island called Oreinê** that is situated 200 stades into the farthest part of the bay towards the open sea and on both sides lies parallel to the coast; here at the present time arriving vessels moor because of raids from the mainland. **Formerly they used to moor in the deepest part of the bay at the island called Didôros Island**, right by this part of the coast; here is a ford crossing to it by which the Barbaroi dwelling roundabout used to overrun the island.” – *PME* 4.



“After passing this place we come to the Azanian Sea... then come to the town of Suche, the island of Daphnidis, and the town of the **Adulitae, a place founded by Egyptian runaway slaves**. This is the principal mart for the Trog(l)odyte, as also for the people of Aethiopia: it is distant from Ptolemais five days' sail. To this place they bring ivory in large quantities, horns of the rhinoceros, hides of the hippopotamus, tortoise-shell, sphingiae, and slaves... Beyond these is the Gulf of Abalites, the island of Diodorus, and other desert islands; also, on the mainland, a succession of deserts...” – *Pliny NH* 6.34.172-174.

- Gabaza (Galala Hills) south of Adulis appears to be its port.
- Gulf of Zula import for crossing into Himyarite area of southern Arabia – site to commemorate victories.

“From Adulis it is a journey of three days to Koloê, an island city that is the first trading post for ivory, and from there another five days to the metropolis itself, which is called Axômitês...” – **PME 4.**

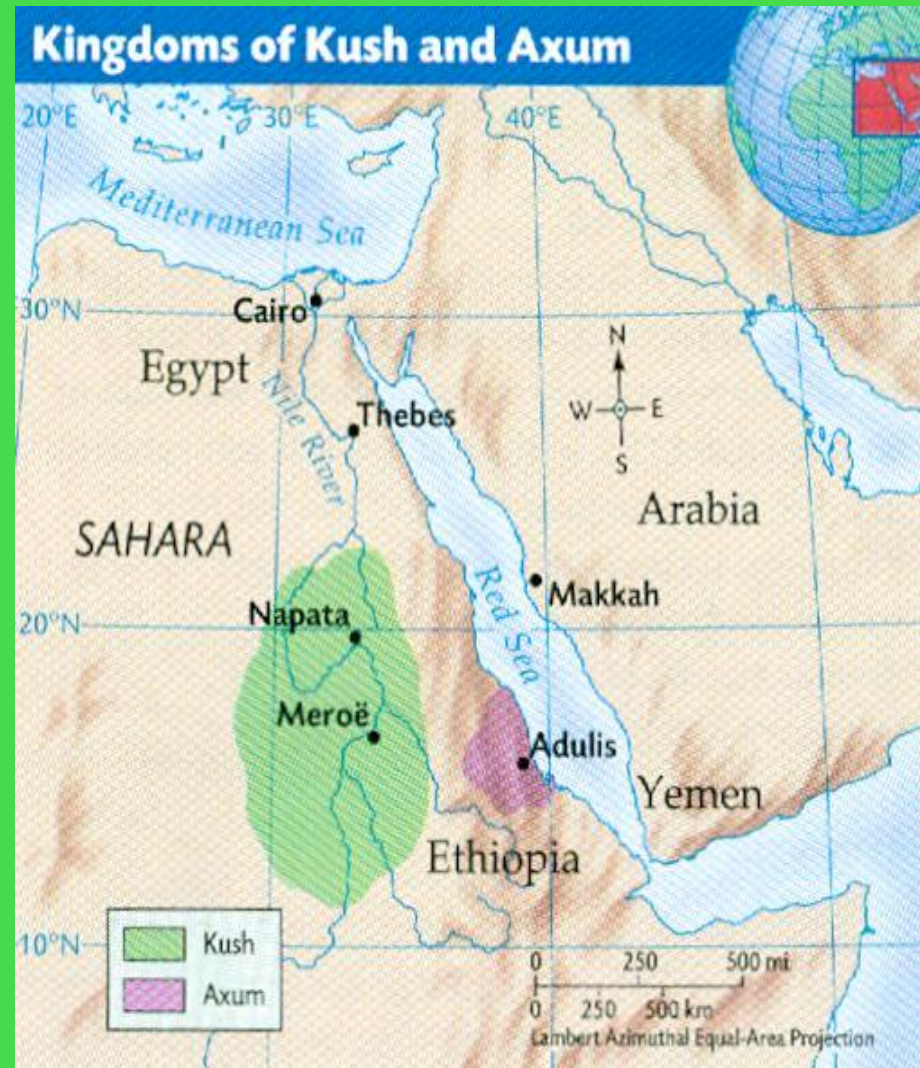


The Stele Inscription

“Great King Ptolemy [III], son of King Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoe, who are brother and sister gods, themselves the children of King Ptolemy and Queen Berenice, who are saviour gods, a descendant on his father’s side from Heracles, son of Zeus, and on his mother’s side from Dionysus, son of Zeus, having assumed from his father a royal dominion of Egypt, Libya, Syria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Lycia, Caria, and the Cyclades islands, led an expedition into Asia with a force of infantry, cavalry, a fleet of ships, and elephants from Troglodytis and Ethiopia. These animals his father and he himself first hunted out from these places and brought to Egypt for use in war. Having become master of all the land west of the Euphrates – Cilicia, Pamphylia, Ionia, the Hellespont, Thrace, and of all the armed forces in those lands as well as Indian elephants, and having brought the monarchs in all those places in subjection to him, he crossed the Euphrates river and subdued Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Susiana, Persis, Media, and all the remaining territory as far as Bactriana. He recovered all those holy objects that had been carried away from Egypt by the Persians, and he carried them back to Egypt with the rest of the treasure from the region. He sent his forces by way of canals that had been dug... [text breaks off here]” – **Cosmas 2.93-98.**

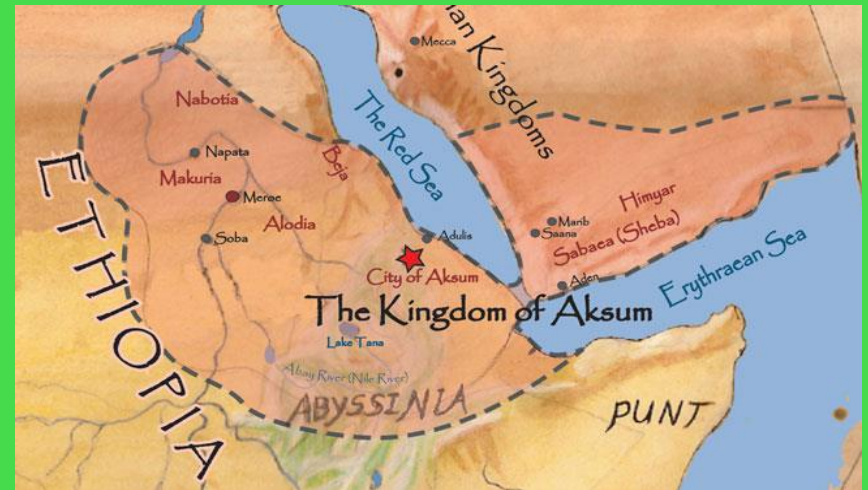
The Kingdom of Axum (or Aksum)

- Kingdom encompassing parts of modern Ethiopia and Eritrea.
- Rise in prosperity influenced by Indian Ocean commerce.
- Similarities of architecture and imported material culture at Adulis and Axum



The Throne Inscription

- Maḥrem = Ares.
- At this time Ethiopia was still associated with Nubia (i.e. Meroë).
- Date of inscription maybe second or early third century? – Aelius Aristides *To Rome* 26.
- Sabaic epigraphy – Gadara.



“...I fought the tribe of Gaza, then won victories over Agame and Siguene... The Aue, Zingabene, Aggabe, Tiamaa, Athagaoi, Kalaa, and the Samene, people who live beyond the Nile in inaccessible and snowy mountains... I subjugated after crossing the river. Then I subjugated the inhabitant of Lasine, Zaa, Gabala who live in the mountains with bubbling and flowing streams of hot water. I subjugated the Atalmo and **Beja** and all the peoples of the Tangaitai with them, who dwell **as far as the frontiers of Egypt**... I subjugated the Rauso who live in the **midst of incense-gathering Barbarians**, and I subjugated the people of the Solate, whom I ordered to guard the coasts of the sea... **I sent both a fleet and an army of infantry against the Arabitai and the Kinaidocolpitai who dwell across the Red Sea**... I made war from Leukê Kômê to the lands of the **Sabaeans**... I express my gratitude to the great god Ares... I made this throne in dedication to Ares in the 27th year of my reign.” – **Cosmas 2.100-116.**

Conquests in Meroë

- Three other Greek inscriptions, one in Axum itself, and two others in Nubian Meroë.
- The last known attestation of a Meroitic king is a graffito on the Nile island of Philae from AD 260.



Obverse: Bust of the king wearing a headcloth. Crescent above the portrait. Legend in Greek ENΔYBIC BACIAEYC, (King Endybis). Reverse: Same design as obverse with legend AXWMITW (Axum) BICI ΔAXY (man of Dakhu) — BMC Aksum 4.

“...the ambassadors of Arabia Felix came and offered to him odoriferous leaves of casia and cinnamon... After them came men of Troglodytis bringing powdered gold and a pair of gryphons harnessed in golden reins... Then came the embassy of the Blemmyes, who carried bows and arrows made of dragon’s bones... This done, when almost all who came on embassy had been seen and were as well or better rewarded than their gifts deserved, last there came the legates of the Axiomitae, who paid no tribute but were his allies and confederates...” — **Heliodorus *Aethiopica* 10.26.**

Christianity Spreads to Axum

- Frumentius of Alexandria credited with bringing Christianity to Axum.
- Demand that Frumentius return to Alexandria by Constantius II.
- Ge'ez inscription of Aezanas – lack of reference to Jesus Christ or Trinity – Greek inscription, clearer references to overt Christian protocols.

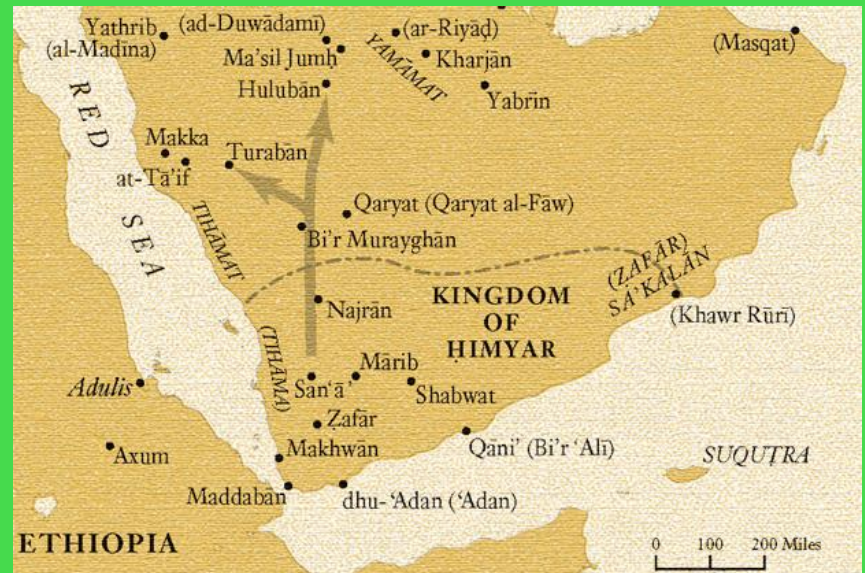
“...considering that you are deserving of the same provident care as the Romans, and desiring to show equal regard for your welfare, we command that the same doctrine be professed in your Churches as in theirs. Send therefore speedily into Egypt the Bishop Frumentius, to the most venerable Bishop George, and the rest who are there, who have especial authority to appoint to these offices, and to decide questions concerning them. For of course you know and remember (unless you alone pretend to be ignorant of that which all men are well aware of) that this Frumentius was advanced to his present rank by Athanasius, a man who is guilty of ten thousand crime...” – **Athanasius *Apology* 45.**

Persecutions and Martyrdom

- Rejection by Ethiopian church of Chalcedean orthodoxy.
- From c. AD 380 the Arabs of Himyar appear to embrace Judaism.
- Martyring of Azqîr (third quarter of the fifth century).
- Pogrom against Christians in Najrân in AD 523 – ordered by Himyarite king Yusuf As'ar Yath'ar.
- Conference at Ramla (AD 524).

Religious War

- Axumite king Kaleb decides to launch, a second expedition against the kingdom of Himyar in AD 525.
- Justin, the Byzantine emperor, asked the archbishop of Alexandria, Timothy, to intercede with the Ethiopian king.
- A force of 120,000 men assembled for crossing the Red Sea.
- Inscription set up by Kaleb in Ge'ez in Southern Arabia.
- Reconstruction of churches and setting up of Sumyafa Ashwa' as a client king.



Byzantium vs. Persia

- Abraha ousts Sumyafa Ashwa' (Esimphaaios).
- Conference at Marib called by Abraha (AD 547).
- Sayf ib dhi Yazan ousts the “Ethiopians” from Himyar – support of Chosroes I.

“The emperor Justinian had the idea of allying himself with the Ethiopians and the Himyarites in order to work against the Persians.” – **Procopius Wars 1.19.1.**

“Later on Abramus too, when at length he had established his power most securely, promised the Emperor Justinian many times to invade the land of Persia, but only once began the journey and then straightway turned back.” (**1.20.13**).

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