

Abstracts

Roberta Tomber

Romans and Troglodytes: exploring interaction on the Red Sea

The relationship between the Romans and the East African Aksumite kingdom and their respective roles in Indian Ocean trade is a matter of some debate. It was frequently considered that, at least during the late Roman period, the role of the Romans was secondary to African middlemen. Recent excavations at Roman sites on the Red Sea, including Aila (Jordan), Berenike and Myos Hormos (Egypt), have recovered artefact types, particularly pottery, inscriptions and coins that inform on the relationship between the Roman world, East Africa and India. Of equal importance are the recent publications from Aksum itself. This talk will summarise this new evidence from the Red Sea sites, as well as relevant published finds from Aksum, South Arabia and India. Based on a chronological approach, and by comparing the early and late Roman periods (first through to the sixth centuries AD), this talk will investigate the changing roles of Romans and East Africans within the Indian Ocean basin, both before and during the period in which the Aksumite kingdom flourished.

Suggested reading

Bard, K. A., Fattovich, R., Manzo, A. and Perlingieri, C. (1997), 'Archaeological investigations at Beita Giyorgis (Aksum), Ethiopia: 1993–1995 field seasons'. *JFA* 24, 387–403.

Casson, L.. (1989), *The 'Periplus Maris Erythraei'. Text with introduction, translation and commentary*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Munro-Hay, S. C. H. (1996), 'Aksumite overseas interests', *The Indian Ocean in Antiquity* (J. Reade, ed.). London : Kegan Paul International in association with the British Museum.

Munro-Hay, S. C. H. (1982), 'The foreign trade of the Aksumite port of Adulis', *Azania* 17, 107–25.

Phillipson, D. W. (2000), *Archaeology at Aksum, Ethiopia, 1993–7*. *Memoirs of the British Institute in Eastern Africa*; no. 17, Report / Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London; 65. London: British Institute in Eastern Africa.

David W. Phillipson

The Red Sea Connections of Aksumite and Post-Aksumite Ethiopia

The Aksumite polity arose in the first century AD, although its antecedents may be traced in northern Ethiopia and in Eritrea for several centuries previously. Although these processes are now seen as largely local, long-distance contacts across and via the Red Sea came to play a substantial role in Aksumite culture and prosperity. This talk will focus primarily on the ivory trade, coinage, luxury imports, Christianity and Islam. Comparisons will be made between the material exchanges of earlier times and the less tangible influences that developed from the fourth century onwards. Discussion of the post-Aksumite period will concentrate on the history of Ethiopian Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Islam, attempting to distinguish between external (partly Red-Sea) influences and indigenous development.

Suggested reading

Phillipson, D. W. (2001), 'Aksum: an African civilisation in its world contexts', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 111. Oxford: published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, 23–59.

Phillipson, D. W. (1998), *Ancient Ethiopia; Aksum, its antecedents and successors*. London: British Museum Press.

Carl Phillips

The Ichthyophagi of the Southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden

Between the 4th century BC and the 1st century AD several Classical authors use the term *ichthyophagi* to describe the coastal inhabitants of the western Indian Ocean. From the shores of the northern Red Sea to the coast of India, the Ichthyophagi were perceived as being almost totally dependant upon fish and other marine produce for their daily subsistence.

The impression given by the Classical authors is one of exclusion and poverty. Usually depicted as being isolated from other societies the Ichthyophagi lacked any positive attributes and even the maritime technologies essential for their survival were considered to be backward and unrefined. A similarly pejorative view can be traced through to the nineteenth century when travellers such as James Wellsted made the analogy between some of the inhabitants he met on the west coast of Arabia and their presumed ancient fish eating ancestors. About the same time other travellers such as Révoil, having observed the presence of ancient shell-middens on the East African coast, made the first tentative equation of this specific type of archaeological site with the historically attested Ichthyophagi.

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In this talk classical texts will be examined to see what specific evidence is provided about the coastal inhabitants of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. This will be compared with more recent ethnographic observations and the information obtained from the preliminary study of a number of coastal sites in South Arabia.

Suggested reading

Burstein, S. M. (1989) *Agatharchides of Cnidus. 'On the Erythraean Sea'*. London. The Hakluyt Society.

Casson, L.. (1989), *The 'Periplus Maris Erythraei'. Text with introduction, translation and commentary*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Jones, H. L. (1930), *The Geography of Strabo vol. 7*. London. The Loeb Classical Library.

Révoil, G. (1882), *La Vallée du Darror. Voyage au pays çomalis (Afrique Orientale)*. Paris. Challamel Ainé.

Wellsted, J. (1838), *Travels in Arabia*. London. John Murray.

Erlich Haggai

Islam and Christianity across the Red Sea: the Saudis and Ethiopia

The talk will discuss the religious dimension of international relations across the Red Sea. It will begin with the formative period of early Islam. Christian Ethiopia was Prophet Muhammad's first 'foreign relations' case when he sent the whole early Islamic community, persecuted in Mecca, to seek asylum with the *najashi (negus)* of Aksum — 'the first hegira' (AD 615–616). The Christian Ethiopian king thus saved Islam, but was said to have himself converted later (*Islam al-najashi*, AD 628). This formative episode left a dual legacy for Muslims in relation to Christian Ethiopia. I shall then succinctly analyse Arabian-Ethiopian relations in mediaeval times. Discussing the sixteenth-century Ottoman-Portuguese struggle over the Red Sea, and the simultaneous Islamic short-lived conquest of Ethiopia, I shall elaborate on the Christian Ethiopian concepts of Islam and of Arabia, also a sphere of double messages.

The main part of the talk will focus on Saudi-Ethiopian modern dialogue. Both states never really separated politics from religion, and in their mutual relations went on to recycle, and readapt, those formative concepts. The talk will follow Saudi policy towards Ethiopia when the latter was exposed to Mussolini's threats and conquest; the nearly intimate dialogue between Haile Selassie and the Saudi royal house in the 1960s, and the deterioration of relations when Ethiopia, under Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974–1991), turned communist. From the 1990s Ethiopia has been re-defined as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, decentralised state, in which Muslims are integrated into the economy, society and politics. This internal Ethiopian process is developing while Saudi-Arabia replaces Egypt as the most important Middle Eastern influence supporting local Islam. Contemporary international relations across the Red Sea, revitalised in scope and significance, are indeed still influenced by the formative legacies of early Islam and medieval Christianity.

Suggested reading

Haggai, E. (2002), *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt and the Nile*. Boulder, Colo.; London : Lynne Rienner.

Haggai, E. (1994), *Ethiopia and the Middle East*. Boulder, Colo.; London: Lynne Rienner, 1994.

Will Facey

Crusaders in the Red Sea in the 1180s AD

The talk investigates the story of Renaud de Chatillon's ill-fated campaign from 'Aqabah into the Red Sea with pre-fabricated ships in AD 1182. His ostensible aim was to threaten the Muslim holy cities, but the sparse details of the expedition allow us to deduce that he also wanted to disrupt the India trade of the Red Sea. In this he succeeded. The chief source quoted for this episode is the *Rihlah* of Ibn Jubayr, who had to go far to the south, to 'Aydhab, before crossing the Red Sea to Jiddah in order to make his pilgrimage to Makkah. Other sources too will be investigated, to try to clarify

the events of the campaign: How far did the Crusaders travel? How much truth is there in the stories that some reached Madinah, and others were taken as prisoners to Makkah? If the latter is true, it would make them the first Christians to reach Makkah, some four centuries before Pedro da Covilha. But the main interest of the story lies in what can be deduced about the Crusader's geographical representations of the world at the time.

Suggested reading

Broadhurst, R. J. C. (1952) *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Goitein, S. D., tr and ed. (1973), *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.

Hourani, G. F. (1995), *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (Carswell, J., ed.). Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.

Moritz, B. (1923), *Arabien. Studien zur physikalischen und historischen Geographie des Landes*. Hannover: Orientbuchhandlung H. Lafaire; reprinted Biblio Verlag, Osnabrück, 1972.

Runciman, S. (1952), *A History of the Crusades Vol. 2: The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Wright, J. K. (1923), *The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades*. New York: American Geographical Society.

Dominique Harre

Al-Qusayr at the time of the Expedition of Egypt (1799–1800)

The talk will describe the small Egyptian port of al-Qusayr as the scientists and the military personnel of the Expedition of Egypt (*L'Expédition d'Égypte*) viewed it in 1799. It will also discuss the extent to which their reports, as well as other contemporary visitors' accounts, can help us to visualise the old communities of al-Qusayr and understand the role of the port through people's economic activities. Today, al-Qusayr has grown to a provincial city of 25,000 people that continues to play an important role in development along the Red Sea. The end of the eighteenth century was a turning point in the region's history. French and English merchants and governments alike anticipated a revival of the Red Sea commercial route through the port of al-Qusayr. At the same time, commercial transit of coffee had partly shifted to al-Qusayr when safety became an issue on the Suez–Cairo road.

The French army entered the port of al-Qusayr on 29 May 1799 with the objective of controlling this remote part of Upper Egypt and the passage across the Red Sea to Arabia and Africa. During their ten-month occupation, the small garrison headed by Lt

Donzelot restored the Ottoman fort, repelled an attack by the English, and tried to secure the old pilgrimage and trade road that linked the Nile valley to the Arabian ports via al-Qusayr. Letters written by Lt Donzelot to other military staff confirm how important it was for him to establish good relations with the shaykhs of Jiddah. Several scholars were with the French troops in al-Qusayr. Their writings and drawings published later in the *Description de l'Égypte* provide a rare depiction of the city and valuable insights into the trade activities. Even though it was only a secondary port for the coffee trade, al-Qusayr was of prime importance as a transit point for food exports to the Arabian cities. In this role, the small city of al-Qusayr, partially populated by traders and seamen from Yambo and Jiddah, was a vital political and economical bond for the east-west relations between Arabia and Upper Egypt.

In spite of their keen interest, the L'Expédition d'Égypte left several questions unanswered about al-Qusayr's population, economic activities or even the town itself. Available letters from Lt Donzelot showed that he was increasingly worried about supplies for his own troops. As for the savants, impressions and objects of curiosity differ from one author to the other. Al-Qusayr is seen, for example, as either a wretched village or a city. Revelations from the *L'Expédition d'Égypte* are only partially complemented by several well-known earlier travellers' accounts.

Suggested reading

Girard, P.-S (Pierre-Simon), *Mémoire sur l'agriculture, l'industrie et le commerce de l'Égypte* (Paris: l'Impr. Royale, 1822).

Laurens, Henry, *L'Expédition d'Égypte: 1798-1801* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997).

Russell, Terence M. (ed.), *The Napoleonic Survey of Egypt : Description de l'Égypte : the monuments and customs of Egypt : selected engravings and texts* (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2001).

Janet C. M. Starkey

Travellers on the Red Sea from al-Qusayr to Sawakin

This talk focuses on European and Arab travellers along the Red Sea coasts from Egypt to Sudan and across the Red Sea. How did these travellers describe the heat and deserts of the Red Sea Hills and the deserts of the Atbai? Why did they travel there? What were there perceptions of the people they met in coastal towns such as al-Qusayr and Sawakin? What did they discover about the customs and cultures of Beja groups such as the 'Ababda and the Bisharin? What contact did they have with the Rashayda or with pilgrims travelling to and from Mecca? Despite the harsh environment of the Red Sea coast and hinterland, the area was traversed by a fascinating range of travellers from traders in elephants in ancient times; explorers in search of gold, emeralds and ostrich feathers; pilgrims from West Africa and Abyssinia; as well as European explorers, doctors, mineralogists, colonial administrators, tourists and sailors.

Suggested reading

Linant de Bellefonds Bey, L. M. A. (no date), *L'Etbaye, pays habité par les Arabes Bicharieh, Géographie, ethnologie, mines d'or*. Paris: Arthus Bertrand.

Klunzinger, C. B. (1878), *Upper Egypt: its people and its products: descriptive account of the manners, customs, superstitions, and occupations of the people of the Nile Valley, the desert, and the Red Sea coast, with sketches of the natural history and geology*. London : Blackie & Son; reprinted London: Darf, 2001).

Murray, G. W. (1935), *Sons of Ishmael: a study of the Egyptian Bedouin*. London: Routledge.

Paul, A. (1954), *A History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; reprinted London: Cass, 1971.

Starkey, J. C. M. and El-Daly, Okasha, eds (2000), *Desert Travellers: from Herodotus to T. E. Lawrence*. Durham: ASTENE.

Beatrice Nicolini

Magical Practice of the *Zār* in East Africa and its relationship with Islam

The widespread presence of magical practices in East Africa, especially in Sudan, and their relationships with Islam is a very complex and broad subject. This talk on the *zār*, a very specific and detailed magical practice, will try to stress analogies not only inside Sudan itself, but also with Sub-Saharan East Africa and with some areas of southern Central Asia; for these three cultural and geographical areas, apparently so far from each other, played a significant role in the history of the Red Sea connections with the slave trade.

When an ill wind blows, the *zār* spirit comes as well, and asks for sacrifices. It comes with its gift of disaster. It lurks in deserts, in *wadis*, beside palm plantations, and in ruins. When the *zār* spirit effects one's body, there is great danger. The *zār* spirit comes from places of suffering to possess a weary soul. A feast is held, with music and perfumed smoke, where the afflicted is made to dance to special chants to purge the spirit of the *zār* from the affected person, after the receipt of gifts and money.

Zār spirits are invisible, mysterious creatures not of human origin who possess human characteristics. Some of them are male and some female, and they all have some relatives. *Zār* spirits are wicked, pagan and against man. They are the source of human diseases. Verses are recited from the Qur'ān by a local *faqi* to rescue the haunted persons from the spirit of the *zār*. The healers are often those who have been affected by the *zār* on many other occasions. In an often conflicting relationship between the *zār* and Islam, the behaviour of and the different reactions by religious leaders and local people will be a further object of this short analysis.

Suggested reading

Boddy, J. (1989), *Wombs and Alien Spirits: women, men and the zar cult in northern Sudan*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Constantinides, P. (1977), 'Ill at Ease and Sick at Heart: symbolic behaviour in a Sudanese healing cult', *Symbols and sentiments: cross-cultural studies in symbolism* (Lewis, I. M., ed.). London: Academic Press.

Ibrahim, H. A. (2004), *Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Mahdī. A Study of Neo-Mahdism in the Sudan, 1899–1956*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Kenyon, S. (1999), 'Zar as Modernization in Contemporary Sudan', *Across the boundaries of belief: contemporary issues in the anthropology of religion* (Klass, M., Weisgrau, M., eds). Boulder, Colo.; Oxford: Westview Press.

Makris, G. P. (2000), *Changing Masters: spirit possession and identity construction among slave descendants and other subordinates in the Sudan*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press.

Natvig, R. J. (1998), 'Arab Writings on Zar from 1880 to the Present', *Sudanic Africa*, 163–78.

Pellizzari, E. (1997), *Possession et thérapie dans la Corne de L'Afrique*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Al-Shahi, A. (1986), *Themes from Northern Sudan*. London: Ithaca Press.

Warburg, G. (2003), *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in Sudan since the Mahdiyya*. London: C. Hurst.

The Speakers

Roberta Tomber, Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

David W. Phillipson, Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Carl Phillips studied prehistory at Edinburgh University. In the early 1980s he was assistant to the archaeological adviser at the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture in the Sultanate of Oman. Having earlier worked in Syria, Iraq and Turkey, he later worked in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. In recent years has conducted field projects in the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen. From 1990 to 2000 he taught at the Institute of Archaeology in London and is currently affiliated to the CNRS UMR 7041, Nanterre, France.

Erlich Haggai is a Professor of Middle Eastern and African History (emeritus) Tel Aviv University. He published nine books on the histories of Ethiopia, Egypt, the Nile, as well as on Youth and Politics in the Arab World. He is the author of ten textbooks on modern Middle Eastern history (in Hebrew) taught in all Israeli universities.

William Facey was born in Zambia in 1948. He read classics, philosophy and art history at Oxford before becoming involved in the Arabian Peninsula in 1974, and has subsequently worked as a museum consultant on numerous museum projects there. He is an independent writer, editor, researcher and publisher on the Arabian countries and has travelled widely in the region. His books and articles cover the history, architecture and early photography of Arabia, and he has a special interest in Arab maritime history. He is currently director of Arabian Publishing Ltd.

Dominique Harre CEDEJ-OUCC, Cairo

Janet Starkey studied Anthropology at Edinburgh University and SOAS, University of London and currently lectures in the Anthropology of the Middle East and in Material Culture at the University of Durham. She has worked in the Gulf, Jordan, Egypt and the Sudan, as well as in the Department of Ethnography, British Museum. She has written or edited several books on travellers in the Middle East and is currently working on Alexander Russell, MD, a Scottish doctor in eighteenth-century Aleppo in northern Syria as well as on the Beja of the Eastern Desert of Egypt and the Sudan.

Dr Beatrice Nicolini is an Assistant Professor of History and Institutions of Africa, Faculty of Political Sciences, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy. She is a historian on the Gulf, Oman and Sub-Saharan East Africa; author of the book: *Makran, Oman and Zanzibar. Three-Terminal Cultural Corridor in the Western Ocean (1799-1856)*, Leiden: Brill, 2004 and winner of the Society for Arabian Studies Grant in 2003; author of many essays and monograph studies, also translated in Arabic.