

RECENT BOOKS

SOURCES FOR NUBIAN HISTORY

Fontes Historiae Nubiorum. Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century AD, ed. by Tormod Eide, Tomas Hägg, Richard Holton Pierce and László Török. Bergen: University of Bergen, Dept. of Greek, Latin and Egyptology. 4 vols: I: *From the eighth to the mid-fifth century BC*, 1994. 343 pp. ISBN 82-991411-6-8. II: *From the mid-fifth to the first century BC*, 1996. 401 pp. ISBN 82-91626-01-4. III: *From the first to the sixth century AD*, 1998. 470 pp. ISBN 82-91626-07-3. [IV: *Addenda et corrigenda. Indices*, forthcoming.]

Nubian history will never be the same again. Here, gathered in one place, are the principal documents related to a millennium and a half of history. To achieve this, the editors have been involved in the labours of Hercules, or so it must seem to them. Their labours will spare other scholars the time-consuming exertions required to assemble such a documentation.

‘Editors’ is an understatement. ‘Authors’ would be closer to the truth, since they have thoroughly reassessed published materials and the end result is a fresh contribution. In fact, three of the texts have never been published before; László Török obtained permission from the Egypt Exploration Society to include three texts from Qaṣr Ibrīm in *Fontes* (III, 1165-75). They are Coptic letters addressed to a tribal chief (*phylarchos*) in the kingdom of Noubadia in the fifth century AD.

Each document in *Fontes* is presented in its original

language together with a translation and a historical commentary. Greek, Latin and Coptic texts are displayed in their respective alphabets. Meroitic texts and ancient Egyptian texts including Demotic are displayed in transliteration.

Within the editorial team there is a division of labour. Tomas Hägg and Tormod Eide present the Greek and Latin documents in an exemplary fashion, including an introduction to each source. László Török draws upon his extensive experience with the history of Kush and provides a thought-provoking commentary on the historical context and significance of each text. He is also responsible for the Meroitic documents. With impressive versatility Richard Pierce wrestles with a range of documents in Coptic, Demotic, Ptolemaic hieroglyphs and other varieties of ancient Egyptian, often heavily influenced by a non-Egyptian language environment. To achieve convincing results from such a variety of difficult texts is a *tour de force*.

Fontes should be in the hands of all students and scholars in this field. It contains most of the documentary sources that support László Török's recent publication: *The Kingdom of Kush. Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civilization*.¹

Many readers will find *Fontes* a particularly dynamic approach to the subject since historical synthesis appears here side by side with the documents, encouraging readers to cross-check the data and to develop their own critical interpretations.

A dynamic dialogue undoubtedly took place between the editors themselves as they were putting their work together, but unfortunately differences of editorial opinion are not generally highlighted in *Fontes*. Nevertheless, readers with sharp eyes may occasionally spot intriguing differences such as Pierce's preference for 'Pi(ankh)y' contrasted with

1 Leiden: Brill 1997, xvii, 590 pp., 6 maps, 28 figs. & 14 pls., [Handbuch der Orientalistik. Erste Abteilung: Der nahe und mittlere Osten, XXXI].

Török's preference for 'Piye' to represent the name of the eighth century BC conqueror. The form 'Piye' follows K.-H. Priese's argument that the Egyptian character '*ankh*' meaning 'life' pointed to the meaning of the Napatan royal name, but was not pronounced. However, Pierce expresses his own viewpoint as follows:

As Priese was well aware, the relation between the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing and the Napatan royal name is a complex one, and it may well be that contemporary and later native Egyptian speakers actually pronounced the name in accordance with what would have been a traditional Egyptian interpretation of its orthography even though the scribes responsible for formulating it had subtly adapted the hieroglyphic writing to the underlying Napatan name (I, 60).

And why not? It would be consistent with the Napatan policy of selecting appropriate Egyptian nomenclature if Pi(ankh)y had made the most of a positive element such as '*ankh*' 'life' in the written form of his name and deliberately encouraged its full use by Egyptians not only in writing, but also in speech. Viva, once again, Piankhy!

The opening paragraph (I, 8) maintains that *Fontes* should be of 'service to users ... in the Sudan'. Modern users of a Nubian language such as Nobīn or Dungulāwī will have their own point of view and perhaps a particular interest in questions such as the following: To what extent can an early Nubian language be attested in the ancient names of persons and places, even during the earlier days of the kingdom of Kush? Although *Fontes* does not investigate this question directly, it does give references to Priese's relevant work and also provides a large number of non-Egyptian names which will be data for further investigation.

Elements from another language, Meroitic, are already visible in the earliest of the *Fontes* documents (eighth [?] century BC) bearing the name of Queen Kadimalo—*malo* 'good' and *kadi* 'lady'. As Török maintains, Queen

Kadimalo was ‘a lady originating, according to her name, from the region of the Meroitic speakers in the South ...’ (I, 41). The implication is that in the North of Kush at least one language other than Meroitic may have been spoken as a vernacular. Continuing attention will need to be given to the use and distribution of various languages in ancient Kush and especially to early Nubian language elements such as those detected by Priese.

One of the great moments in the cultural history of Kush was the time when Meroitic appeared in royal inscriptions as the national language. As far as datable inscriptions go, the *hieroglyphic* form of the Meroitic alphabet appeared in the second century BC in the name of Queen Shanakdakheto on her temple in Naqa (II, 660). On the other hand, the *cursive* form of this alphabet was found on fragments of a roughly contemporary offering table which seemed to bear a name ending in the letters *-iwal*.

At this point a simple, but confusing mistake is introduced into *Fontes*. In his introduction to the Meroitic alphabet Török writes the following:

... the earliest preserved document in the cursive writing (Hintze 1959, 36, frn. of the offering table of King Tarekeniwal) similarly dates from the late 2nd century BC (II, 359-60).

The problem is that there was no King Tarekeniwal attested in the second century BC, although there was a well-attested King Tarekeniwal in the second century AD.

This confusion seems to have arisen from a mistaken reading of Fritz Hintze’s remarks in his publication of the fragments of the offering table. Hintze wrote,

Zur Endung *-iwl* vgl. Namen wie *Trekeniwl* u. a.²

2 Fritz Hintze, *Studien zur meroitischen Chronologie und zu den Opfertafeln aus den Pyramiden von Meroe*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag (Abhandlungen der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur und

In identifying *-iwl* or *-iwal* as the final element in a royal name, Hintze merely invited the reader to compare these characters with the final letters in the name of King Tarekeniwal. He did not reconstruct the initial letters of the royal name, but presented it in his list of rulers as ‘35. ((...-*iwal*))?’³ In Török’s own list no ruler with the element *-iwal* in his or her name appears until the second half of the second century AD.⁴

Once the phantom of a ‘King Tarekeniwal ... from the late second century BC’ has been introduced, it spreads like a virus through *Fontes* with further mentions in II, 649 and III, 762 and also in Török, *The Kingdom of Kush*.⁵

In *Studien*, Hintze suggested that ...*-iwal* might have been the husband of Shanakdakheto.⁶ Whether or not this point is ever substantiated, it does seem that the cursive and the hieroglyphic forms of Meroitic appeared at approximately the same time in these documents.

A Rosetta Stone situation arises in *Fontes* II, 689-700 with the celebrated trilingual inscription of 29 BC on the Nubian campaign of Cornelius Gallus. The inscription is written in Latin, in Greek and in Egyptian hieroglyphs of the Roman period. Three of the editors of *Fontes* are involved in the analysis, Hägg for the Latin and Greek, Pierce for the Egyptian and Török for the historical commentary. It is particularly instructive for historians to see how the story is told differently for the readership of each language. A distinct purpose can be detected for each version.

It is a pity that the same approach was not fully applied in III, 1094-1100 (cf. also 1100-3) to an inscription of Ezana, King of Axum. Only the Greek version is trans

Kunst, Jahrgang 1959, 2) 1959, 36.

3 Hintze, *Studien*, 33.

4 Török, *Kingdom of Kush*, 200-6.

5 Török, *Kingdom of Kush*, 62 n. 53.

6 Hintze, *Studien*, 39.

lated in *Fontes*, although the commentary mentions further versions, that is, 'one in Ge'ez written in South Arabian script and one in non-vocalized Ethiopic' (III, 1097). The non-Greek versions are important and need to be included, if possible, in volume IV (forthcoming). This would allow the reader to make his or her own examination of the versions for significant differences in purpose and detail.

Fontes is a collection of historical documents and should not be restricted to documents within the linguistic competence of the editors (if such a limitation is the case here). If the non-Greek versions of the Ezana inscriptions have already been published competently by other scholars, perhaps permission could be sought for the inclusion of their work in volume IV of *Fontes*.

Other Axumite inscriptions are of great importance with respect to the decline of Meroe, particularly the vocalized Ge'ez inscription of Ezana described in III, 1098. Inscriptions such as this have a special claim for inclusion in *Fontes*.

If the editors decide that no Axumite inscriptions should appear in the forthcoming volume IV, it is suggested that their arguments for not doing so might be summarized there. If any Axumite documents with a bearing on the kingdom of Kush have escaped mention in *Fontes* I-III, references to them should at least be listed in volume IV.

To provide balance for the Greek New Testament account of the conversion of Candace's treasurer in *Fontes* III, 845-50, it might also be appropriate for volume IV to include a list of the historical references to Kush from the Hebrew Old Testament.

Similar consideration might be given to the Aramaic texts of Elephantine which are mentioned in the source bibliography in II, 536. Are any of these documents excluded because of their language rather than any lack of historical content?

Even though certain relevant documents might have been omitted from *Fontes*, the selection has generally been

done to a high standard. The collection is distinguished by the number, significance and appropriateness of its documents.

The standard of editing is also high, although it is perhaps inevitable in a joint work of this size that a few infelicities should appear. English spelling has not yet been reformed to the extent that 'garantor' (II, 436), 'garantee' (III, 867) or 'turists' (II, 539) would be acceptable. In II, 580 & 581 the goddess of truth should not have been transliterated as *M^c3t*, but as *M3^ct* (cf. II, 397). In III, 1206 a corrigendum which is said to apply to line 10 of a text needs itself to be corrected, since the reference should be to line 8. As the corrigendum is now only an insert on a separate piece of paper, there should be no problem in rectifying this for inclusion in the forthcoming volume IV.

Certain mistakes could have been spotted and corrected if there had been a more thorough co-ordination of the work of different editors. For instance, the name of King Irike-Amannoté is correctly transliterated by one editor with an initial glottal stop (ʔ) as *ʔI-r-ʔImn-nīwt* (II, 400 and 428), but incorrectly transliterated by another editor with an initial *ʿayn* (ʿ) as *ʿrk-ʔImn-nwtj* or *ʿrk-ʔImn-nwtj* (II, 397). On II, 630 the place name Debod or Dabod appears spelled in two different ways by two different editors. Although these examples are trivial, they do point to the need for a tighter co-ordination with respect to content as well as form.

The study of historical documents on the history of Kush is fluid rather than frozen. In spite of the high quality of this work, it will soon be clear to the reader that many translations and conclusions can be debated. In II, 613 Pierce, following F. Ll. Griffith, openly acknowledges that sometimes in the case of particularly difficult texts he has elected to 'translate every legible word in spite of the nonsense that results'. The reader should be encouraged to think through the results published here and to come up with even better answers. *Fontes* presents a challenge to those who are

prepared to give it fresh thought.

The price of *Fontes* is attractive, ranging from approximately \$25 to \$30 per volume, or more precisely in terms of Norwegian kroner: NOK 180 for volume I, NOK 200 for volume II, NOK 220 for volume III and NOK 150 for the forthcoming volume IV. There is a small additional charge for postage. Copies may be obtained from the following address: IKRR/Department of Greek, Latin and Egyptology, Øisteinsgate 3, N-5007 Bergen, Norway.

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