

## Greek Inscriptions from the Axumite Kingdom: Selections from *Recueil des inscriptions de L'Éthiopie des périodes pré-Axoumite et Axoumite*

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### I. Inscription 270a

This Greek inscription was discovered at Geza Agumaï north of the city of Axum near ruins dated to the Axumite period. It covers about three quarters of one face of a nepheline monolith that is about 2.5m high, 1m wide, and 26 cm thick. The same text is engraved on another face of the stone in the Ethiopian (Ge'ze) language in Southern Arabic script. The text, as is typical with official writing, is engraved with care (I:367–8).

**Inscription:** We, Ezana, king of the Axomites, of the Homerites and of Raeidan, of the Ethiopians, of the Sabaeitans and of Silee, of Tiamo, of the Bougaeitans and of Kasou, king of kings, son of the invincible god Ares—When the tribe of the Bougaeitans revolted, we sent our brothers Sazana and Adipha to make war on them and, when they surrendered, they brought themselves to us with their entire people and their animals (3112 cows, 6224 sheep, and 677 beasts of burden). We satisfied this people, numbering 4400, and fed them for four months from our provisions, with wine, mead, beer, and water, and with 22000 loaves of spelt bread, until the time we moved them on. And they who had been brought before us, after we clothed them and favored them with what they needed, we moved them to a part of our territory named Matlia and ordered that they again be supplied in these places by providing each of their chieftains 4190 cows to ensure that the six chieftains had 25140 cows. And in thanks to the invincible Aires who fathered me, we had dedicated there a golden statute, a silver statue, and three bronze statues, and I had this stele consecrated and dedicated to heaven, to earth, and to Ares the Invincible who fathered me. If someone offends the latter, let him be destroyed utterly by the god of heaven and earth, and let his name no longer exist in the land of the living. And in thanksgiving we have made this consecration for the good. And at the same time, on the other hand we have consecrated to invincible Ares ΚΟΓΑΤΕ και ΒΕΔΙΕ. (III:12)

The end of the inscription has had added, after the symbol of a palm, the mention of another consecration to Ares. The words transliterated into Greek as ΚΟΓΑΤΕ και ΒΕΔΙΕ (KOGHATE and BEDIE) are unknown and may be technical terms in the Ethiopian language related to

pagan religious practices. The Ethiopian-script version of this inscription appears to end the same way but is so badly damaged that the words cannot be made out. (III:15)

## II. Inscription 271

Sometime around 1916, workers in the 'Enda Sem'on district of the city of Axum discovered three stelae while building a house for *Alāqa Zeru Gabra-'Egzi'e* near the place where the 1906 German archaeological mission had uncovered the ruins of a palace. Fearing that the discovery would prompt authorities to halt the construction, *Alāqa Zeru* hid the stelae safely. At his death, they were transferred to the care of the cathedral Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in Axum.

This Greek inscription in letters that range from 21–24cm tall is on face of one of the limestone stelae, which is about 1.63m high, 60.5cm wide, and 11.5cm thick. The other face has 48 lines of inscription in the Ge'ez language in Sabeen script, which continues onto the edge of the stone and ends in an engraved cross (I:371–2).

The king in this inscription and in items 270 and 270a (above) is named as “Ezana,” and both figures are identified as coming from the same tribe and as descendants of the same king (“Elle-Amida”). In this inscription, however, the phrase *δοῦλος Χριστοῦ*, “servant of Christ,” replaces “son of Invincible Ares” or “the invincible.” While many scholars conclude that this is the same man, represented in item 270 by an inscription made before his conversion to Christianity and here by one made after his conversion, others dispute this, saying that Roman sources call Ezana a pagan at the time of the war described in this inscription. While the difficulty of precisely dating both Ethiopian and Roman evidence likely makes it impossible to decide with any certainty, the proposal that the same King Ezana left inscriptions that reveal his progression from a pagan to a Christian ruler does fit the evidence (III:20–21).

**Inscription:** In the faith of God and the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to Him who has preserved me in the kingdom by faith in His Son Jesus Christ, to him who always has helped me, I, Ezana, king of the Axomites, the Himyarites, the Reeidan, the Sabeens, the Sileel, the Kaso, the Beja and of Tiamo, Bisi Alene [an Ethiopian title of kingship], son of Elle-Amida and servant of Christ, give thanks to the Lord my God even though my mouth and mind cannot fully express thanks for all the grace He has given me. He has given me strength and power; He has given me grace through the great name by His Son, in whom I believe, and He has made me the leader of all my kingdom because of my faith in Christ, by his will and by the power of Christ. It is He who has led me, for I believe in Him and He has made Himself my guide. I went out to fight the Nubians because the Mangartha, the Khasa, the Atiaditai, and the Bareotai shouted against them, saying, “The Nubians have overwhelmed us; come to our rescue, for they are slaughtering us.” I arose in the power of the God Christ, in Whom I believe and Who guides me. I departed from Axum on the eighth day of the month of Maghkit, a Saturday, with faith in God. I advanced to Mambarya and there I resupplied (III:16).