

# The Ancient Egyptian Etymology of *Habašāt* “Abessinia”<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. History of Research: The Missing Semitic Etymology of *Habašāt*

Before the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, a certain toponym has been widely used, which – for political correctness’ sake – is now being avoided: “*Abyssinia*” or rather “*Abessinia*”<sup>2,3</sup>. This fact is even more astonishing since that old-established term seems virtually to have been made for evading political animosities and national sensitivities for it refers to *both* Ethiopia *and* Eritrea equally, i.e., the highland between the Blue Nile and the Red Sea with regard to its religious and linguistic affiliation (Christian and Semitic). Admittedly, fifty years ago, “Abessinia”, referring to the political centre of the country, had been more or less synonymous with “Ethiopia”, but this has changed and the toponym can now be used without any tendency whatsoever. In this respect, it stands amongst expressions such as “Nubia” for example. Some weak pejorative connotations in Italian can readily be set aside as being idiosyncratic, taking into account the Italian involvement in Ethiopia. Another reason, why “Abessinia” should be revived as a *terminus technicus*, is, that it is of indigenous origin, as opposed to Gr. Αἰθιοπία. The inscriptions of the Aksumite King Ezana reflect this contrast very nicely (DAE 11:1ff.):

- 1 Preliminary remarks: During the discussion following my paper “*Punt in Abessinia*”, the chairman David Phillipson expressed his disconcertment on the way, Egyptologists seem to treat “*Punt*” as an invariable geographical term, whose meaning remained unchanged for millenia. Since my lecture was the shortened version of a long article in the announced two-volume publication on the “*Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*” edited by S. Wenig et al. I take the liberty of concentrating on one single aspect of my talk, thus taking up Dr. Phillipsons remark.
- 2 The spelling “*Abyssinia*” should indeed be avoided, for it suggests a (pejorative) connection to “abyss”.
- 3 R.M. Voigt, in: S. Uhlig (Hrsg.), *Encyclopädia Äthiopica* I, Wiesbaden 2003, 59-65. The forms with <y> are an academic “Volksetymologie” (comp. Gr. ἄβυσσος “Abyss”).

𐤏𐤇𐤋 / 𐤏𐤏𐤗 / [...] / 𐤏𐤇𐤋𐤏𐤗𐤏𐤏 /  
 zn / ngś / [...] / w=ḥbšt /  
 ΑΙΖΑΝΑC ΒΑCΙΑΕΥC [...] ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ ΔΙΘ[Ι]ΟΠΩΝ (Gr.)  
 ‘zn bzw. ‘ydn / mlk / [...] / w=ḥbs<sup>2</sup>t.m / (Pseudo-Sabaic)  
 “Ezana, king of [...] and of the Ethiopians/Abessinians”

One Aksumite coin has the Greek transcription of Ethiopian ḥbšt: ΑΒΑCΚΙΝ<sup>4</sup>, in Tigrinya ḥabāša is the usual form, whereas Amharic has lost the word-initial laryngal (*abāša*), both derived from Gə‘əz ḥabäs(ät) + ya. Epigraphic South Arabian inscriptions mention ḥabašāt (ḥbs<sup>2</sup>t)<sup>5</sup> and her derivations several times.<sup>6</sup> It is unclear, whether they refer to both sides of the Red Sea, which was clearly not the case in later times.<sup>7</sup>

<i>mlk ḥbs<sup>2</sup>t w-’ksmn</i>	„king of Habašāt and Aksum“
’rd ḥbs <sup>2</sup> t w-’ksmn	„land of Habašāt and Aksum“
ḥzb ḥbs <sup>2</sup> t	„troups of Habašāt“.

The inhabitants of Abessinia were called ḥbs<sup>2</sup>n in Epigraphic South Arabian texts, which can probably be vocalized ‘aḥbūs<sup>2</sup>-ān, compare (North-)Arabic *al-’uḥbūš* (< \**al-’aḥbūš*).<sup>8</sup> H. Ludolf<sup>9</sup> was the first to link the place-name ḥabašāt with Arabic ḥabaša “to earn, collect”, after all Ethiopia is known as a multiracial state „*Habesh colluuiem vel mixturam gentium denotat*.“ This proposal was taken up by E. Glaser<sup>10</sup> and especially Carlo Conti Rossini<sup>11</sup>. According to Glaser, the sense of ḥabašāt was not “gathered (people)” in respect to them being scattered, but “gatherers of incense”, referring to the major export product.<sup>12</sup> From this point

- 4 W. Hahn, Das Kreuz mit dem Abessinierland, in: Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für Numismatik (Wien), 18, 1999, 5-8.
- 5 A. K. Irvine, On the Identity of Habashat in the South Arabian Inscriptions, in: JSS 10, 1965, 178-196, comp. W. W. Müller, Südarabisches zum Namen Aksum, in: Aethiopia 1, 1998, 217-220.
- 6 W. W. Müller, Abessinier und ihre Namen und Titel in vorislamischen südarabischen Texten, in: Neue Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik 3, 1978, 159-168.
- 7 Of special interest is the inscription CIH 308, in which a coalition between the Aksumite king GDR(T) and the king of Saba ‘ against Himyar is discribed, comp. N. Nebes, Sabäische Texte, in: B. Janowski & G. Wilhelm (eds.), Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, Neue Folge II, Gütersloh 2005, 332-367.
- 8 Ibn Manzūr, Lisān al-‘Arab, 6 Bde, Beirut 1990, 278.
- 9 H. Ludolf, Historia aethiopica, Frankfurt am Main 1681, chapter 1.1.1.
- 10 E. Glaser, Die Abessinier in Arabien und Afrika, München 1895, 8. Glaser folgt einem Vorschlag von W.M. Müller, Asien und Europa nach altägyptischen Denkmälern, Leipzig 1893, 116.
- 11 C. Conti Rossini, Sugli Habašat, in: RRAL XV, 1906, 39-59; C. Conti Rossini, Expéditions et possessions des Habašat en Arabie, in: JA 18, 1921, 5-36; C. Conti Rossini, Storia d’Etiopia, Bergamo 1928, i.
- 12 E. Glaser, Die Abessinier in Arabien und Afrika, München 1895, 8. Glaser follows a proposal by W.M. Müller, Asien und Europa nach altägyptischen Denkmälern, Leipzig 1893, 116.

of view, *ḥabašāt* seems to have originally denoted both Abessinia and today's Jemen, i.e., those regions, where *boswellia* bushes grow. Glaser draws our attention to a tribe called Ἀβασσηνοί mentioned by Uranios who says, that they were Arabs (ἔθνος Ἀραβίος), who lived with the Hadramites (Χατραμῶται) behind (μετά) the Sabaeans (Σαβαίοι) and produced incense (θυμίαμα). Due to massive pressure from the Hadramites, they had crossed the Bab el-Mandeb and brought the Semitic language to the African continent. Thus, the foundation of the later Aksumite culture were laid. But Glaser goes even further: He proposes an alleged Semitic \**Aṭyūb* “(incense)-gatherers” as etymology of Gr. Αἰθιοπία. Especially Conti Rossini has opposed these theories and his strong argument is, that Gəʿəz was particularly close to Sabaic, but not to Hadramitic.<sup>13</sup> That the Semitic immigrants came from Mahara was therefore rather unlikely. They should rather have come from Western South Arabia. To support this, Conti Rossini cites Yemenite place-names such as *Ġabal Ḥobēš* (\**Ḥubaiš*) and *Wādī Ḥabūš*.<sup>14</sup> Already A. J. Drewes has expressed doubts on a Sabaic etymology, mainly because *ḥbs<sup>2</sup>t* does not appear in Epigraphical South Arabic inscriptions prior to the pre-Aksumite kingdom of DʿMT and must therefore obviously be a genuine Ethiopic expression.<sup>15</sup> Irvine as well states, that previous etymologies were not convincing<sup>16</sup> and it was only recently, that R. Voigt has declared himself against any Semitic etymon produced so far.<sup>17</sup> Thus, *al-ḥabaš* is just a “black from *al-ḥabaša*” (*ǧins min as-sūdān*) or *al-ḥubšān* an “(Abessinian) locust” and have nothing to do with their dislocation or mobility (comp. *ḥabaša*).<sup>18</sup> In other words: *Ḥabašāt* cannot be linked to any Proto-Semitic root!

## 2. The Egyptian Connection

At this point, Ancient Egyptian enters the game. This is by no means unexpected, for Egyptians have been traveling along the Red Sea coast for centuries, if not millennia. Hieroglyphic inscriptions tell us, that the people, they met at the Horn of Africa (Punt)<sup>19</sup> were not called “Puntites”, as might be expected, but “bearded ones” or *ḥbs.ti.w* in Egyptian.

13 C. Conti Rossini, *Sugli Habašat*, in: RRAL XV, 1906, 39-59; C. Conti Rossini, *Expéditions et possessions des Habašat en Arabie*, in: JA 18, 1921, 5-36; C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d’Etiopia*, Bergamo 1928, i.

14 R. M. Voigt, in: S. Uhlig (Hrsg.), *Encyclopädia Äthiopica I*, Wiesbaden 2003, (59-65) 59.

15 A. J. Drewes, *Inscriptions de l’Éthiopie antique*, Leiden 1962.

16 Vgl. A. K. Irvine, in: B. Lewis et al. (Hrsg.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden 1971, 9f., s.v. Habašat.

17 Vgl. A. K. Irvine, in: B. Lewis et al. (Hrsg.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden 1971, 9f., s.v. Habašat.

18 E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon II*, London-Edinburgh 1865, 501.

19 For an overall view of the recent discussion see K. A. Kitchen, *Punt*, in: LÄ IV, 1982, 1189-1201, F. Breyer, *Punt*, in: S. Uhlig (Hrsg.), *Encyclopädia Äthiopica*, (Vol. 4, 2010) and K. A. Kitchen, *Punt and how to get there*, in: Or 40, 1971, 184-207; D. Meeks,

Urk. IV, 345:14 (New Kingdom)<sup>20</sup>



*ḥbs.tiw n(i)w t3-nčr*  
*“the bearded ones of gods-land (=Punt)”*

Ptolemaic period

Edfu



Philae



In one inscription accompanying a relief of Amun in Debod (Nubia), this god is addressed as “*Bēga of Punt*” and his epitheton here is “*the long bearded*”.

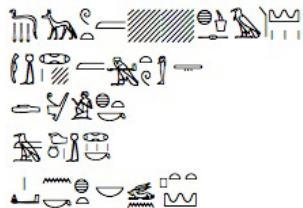
Inscription from Debod (Roeder §147)

*“the long bearded, the perfect Bēga of Punt”*



*k3i-ḥbs mč3i nfr n(i) Pwn.t{t}*

In Edfu again, there is a close connection between “bearded” persons and Punt (Chassinat, Mammesi 96:5):



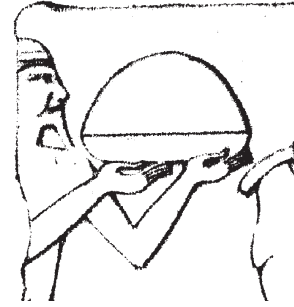
*“Welcome ... [ruler of] the “bearded/abessinians”*  
*who brings the presents from Mtw?.*  
*I (herewith) accept thine offering[s],*  
*I touch thy presents,*  
*I give thee all things of Punt”*

Grammatically, *ḥbs.ti.w* is a plural form of the Nisba derived from *ḥbs* “beard”. But how is the association *Punt – beard* to be explained? To answer this question, a closer look on the Egyptian reliefs depicting Puntites is most helpful, especially the

Locating Punt, in: D. O’Connor & S. Quirke, *Mysterious Lands. Encounters With Ancient Egypt* 5, London 2003, 53-80, sowie S. Martinssen, *Untersuchungen zu den Expeditionen nach Punt*, (unpublished magister thesis), Hamburg 1999. On the location of Punt in Southeastern Sudan and Northern Ethiopia see R. Fattovich, *Alla ricerca di Punt*, in: *Ligabue Magazine* 5, 1984, 98-103; R. Fattovich, *The Problem of Punt in the Light of Recent Fieldwork in the Sudan*, in: S. Schoske (Hrsg.), *Akten des vierten Internationalen Ägyptologen Kongresses, München 1985, IV, SAK Beih., 4. Hamburg 1991, 257-272*; R. Fattovich, *Punt: the archaeological perspective*, in: *Sesto Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia, Atti (Turin, 1993) II, 399-405*; R. Fattovich, *Punt: the archaeological perspective*, in: *BzS* 6, 1996, 15-29.

<sup>20</sup> E. Dévaud, *Un Signe Hiératique peu connu*, in: *RecTrav* 38, 1916, 183-187, esp. 186, on a dual writing with two “beard”-signs.

so-called “hall of Punt” in Queen Hatshepsuts mortuary temple in Deir el-Bahari. Here, the Puntites are shown with long and pointed beards just as gods and (even female!) pharaohs wear them according to Egyptian iconographical conventions. This explains, why so many Egyptian texts refer to “Punt” as “*gods-land*” and even state, that certain gods originally came from this remote country (Coffin texts 47, 112, 187, 195, 334, 596, 1028). It may have helped, that Punt was the land, where myrrh and incense came from, both believed to be the scent of gods<sup>21</sup>. If we want to understand this, we must know, that the Ancient Egyptians have always been more or less beardless, or at least they



were portrayed as such. Indeed, according to Egyptian *Weltanschauung* a (normal) beard was somehow synonymous with barbarian (i.e., non-Egyptians), especially the “*wretched Asians*”. In the later stages of Egyptian, the root *ḥbś* “beard” was abandoned, probably because its sense had changed to “*Abessinian*”, and replaced by a Berber loanword (𓆎𓆏𓆑 < *Šilḥ. ta-mar.t, Twareg: a-mar, pl. i-marr-ən*).<sup>22</sup> Naturally, over the long period, in which *ḥbś.ti.w* occurs, its meaning has changed. In the second millennium B.C., Egyptians most probably still could recognize the underlying root, but in the first millennium B.C., semantics had shifted from a figurative to a very specific sense and the original one was abandoned. This process can clearly be traced if we examine the archive of the “*Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*” in Berlin (<http://aaew.bbaw.de/tla> [5.4.2006]). There is for example, a lexeme that has so far received very little attention, mainly because its sense has been obscured by the editors of the “*Wörterbuch*” (Wb III 257:2, Ptolemaic). It is written with the “divine beard” used as a logogram (*ḥbś* and accompanied by a so-called phonetic complement (*ś*), which indicates the precise reading.



“*Art Krüge für Myrrhe, wohl nms.t zu lesen*”

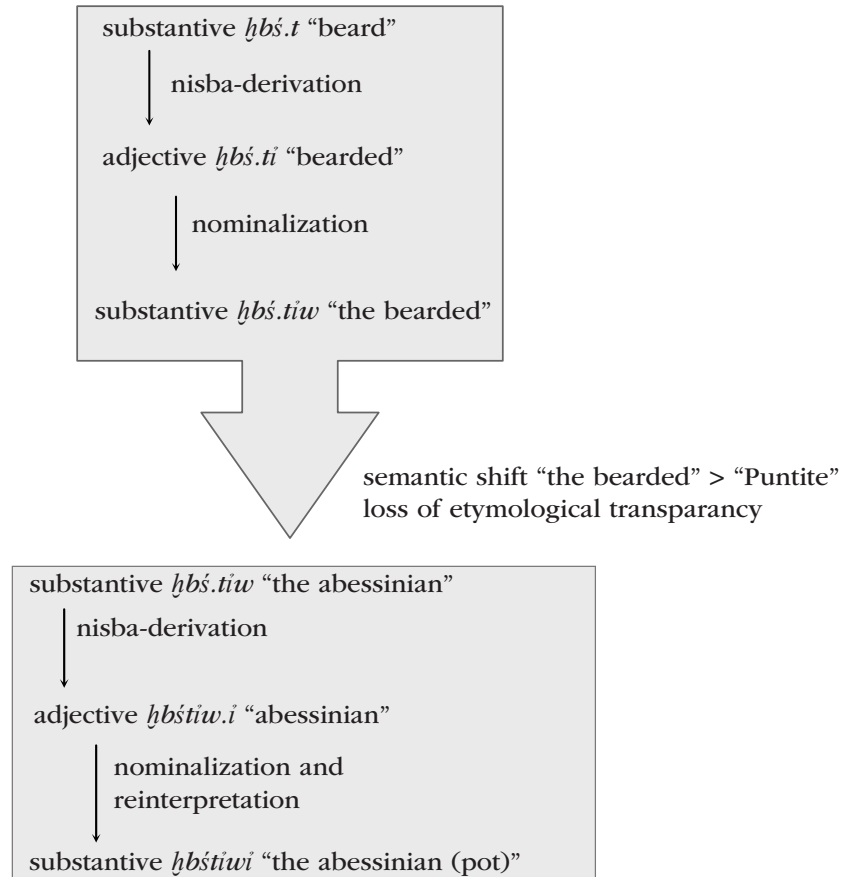
(“*Some sort of pot used for myrrh, probably to be read nms.t*”)

Because the editors could not make any sense of the obvious connection with *ḥbś* “beard”, they tried to explain the first sign as an error and in a reconstructed hieratic *Vorlage* the “beard-sign” indeed comes very close to the *nms*-sign (No. T 34 in Gardiner’s sign list). But if we now apply the proposed meaning “*Abessinia(n)*” for *nms.t* in later times, the reading makes perfect sense. In the light of Punt being the main supplier of incense for the Egyptian market, could there be any more appropriate name for “*some sort of pot used for myrrh*” than “*the Abessinian*”

21 A. Mariette, *Catalogue Général des Monuments d’Abydos*, Paris 1880, 233f., Nr. 766. and W. Helck et al. (ed.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* s.v. Bart.

22 W. Vycichl, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte*, Leuven 1983, 120.

(*pot*)”? The grammatical processes involved are quite complicated. Starting point is the substantive<sup>sic!</sup> *ḥbs.t* “beard” and its adjectival derivation *ḥbs.ti* “bearded” (nisba). Once nominalized (“*the bearded ones*” = *Puntites*) and equipped with a specific meaning (semantic shift to “*the Abessinian [person]*”), the substantive could once again be transferred into an nisba-adjective (“*Abessinian*”) and nominalized for a second time (“*the Abessinian [pot]*”).



### 3. Phonological Considerations

As far as phonology is concerned, the borrowing of *ḥbs.ti(w)* into an Ethiosemitic language causes no difficulties at all. The term was taken over in Northeastern Africa in approximately the second half of the first millennium B.C., i.e., at a time, when the Egyptian laryngals had already lost their distinction as reflected in spellings with mixed *h*, *ḥ* and *ḥ*. In Coptic, only *ϣ* (and *ϣ* respectively) remain. Additionally,

the weakness of Ethiopian laryngals should be taken into account (alternation of spellings with <h> and <ḥ> in later manuscripts). It has also to be kept in mind, that a number of entries in the Ethiopic lexicon show irregularities as far as the correspondence of Proto-Semitic laryngals is concerned, for example 'əg<sup>w</sup>l, 'əg<sup>w</sup>āl “young one, infant” as opposed to Central-Semitic 'igl.<sup>23</sup> But even so, the change from <h> to <ḥ> is no obstacle in the credibility of the proposed equation, given the fact that minor shifts of such kind frequently occur in borrowings and lie within the tolerance of contact linguistics. Despite this tiny flaw, all the other consonants stand up to phonological scrutiny. On the common Afro-Asiatic level, Eg. <ś> generally corresponds to Semitic <s<sup>2</sup>> i.e., Akkad. <š> /s/; Hebr. <ś>, Arab. <š>, as numerous striking examples show, for instance Eg. śp.t “lip, rim” – Akkad. s/šaptu(m), Hebr. śäpä, Arab. šafat<sup>m</sup>.<sup>24</sup> Another example which includes Ethio-Semitic is 𐩦𐩣𐩪 śälläsä “threefold, make thrice” – Ar. talāt, EpigrSouthArab. s<sup>2</sup>lt/ṭlt, Soq. síle, Hebr. šāloš, Aram.-Syr. tälāt, Ugar. ṭlt, Phoen. ššš, Akkad. šalāš “three”.<sup>25</sup> Hieroglyphic transcriptions of Canaanite personal and place names show, that the same holds true for the historical period, where Eg. <ś> represents <š>, i.e., /š/ (compare <i-ś-k-ḥ-i> – <\*Ašqalōn>). Similarly, Egyptian words and phrases were written with <š> in cuneiform texts. (štp.nṣR(.w) – <šá-ti-ip-na-ri-a> /satipnaria/ “chosen of Ra”).<sup>26</sup> The sound correspondences of <b> and <t> are equally well established (Eg. ib “heart” and mwt “to die” – Semit. √lb(b) and √mwt, or Eg. nb t3-wi “lord of the two lands” – cuneiform ni-ib ta-wa). The glide <i>, forming the nisba-adjective, has long since disappeared with the general loss of sounds in word final position in Late Egyptian, like in Copt. 𐩪𐩣𐩪 “heart” <äg. ḥ3.ti (lit. “the pointed one”) or Copt. 𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠 <imn.tt (\*iamēntiāt) “netherworld” (lit. “which belongs to the west”).

#### 4. How Names Change: From Punt to Ḥabašāt

Now let us consider the historical plausibility of “Abessinians” taking over an Egyptian expression as a self-denomination. First of all, paradoxical as it may seem, this phenomenon is comparatively frequent. Prominent example is the way in which the Hittites described themselves. According to the indigenous name of their language (Heth. nesumnili “Hittite”), the late bronze-age inhabitants of central Asia minor saw themselves as “Nesiens”, which is rooted in the first Anatolian empire of Nesa / Kaneš (today: Kültepe). On the other hand without exception, even Hittites make use of the Akkadian term Hatti (<[kur] ha-ti<sup>ku</sup>> /Ḥattusa[s utne]/) when referring to their own country. The reason for this is, that Hatti has

23 J. Tropper, Altäthiopisch, Münster 2002, 32.

24 W. Schenkel, Einführung in die altägyptische Sprachwissenschaft, Göttingen 1990, 51.

25 W. Leslau, Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez, Wiesbaden 1991, 529f.

26 W. Schenkel, Einführung in die altägyptische Sprachwissenschaft, Göttingen 1990, 37.

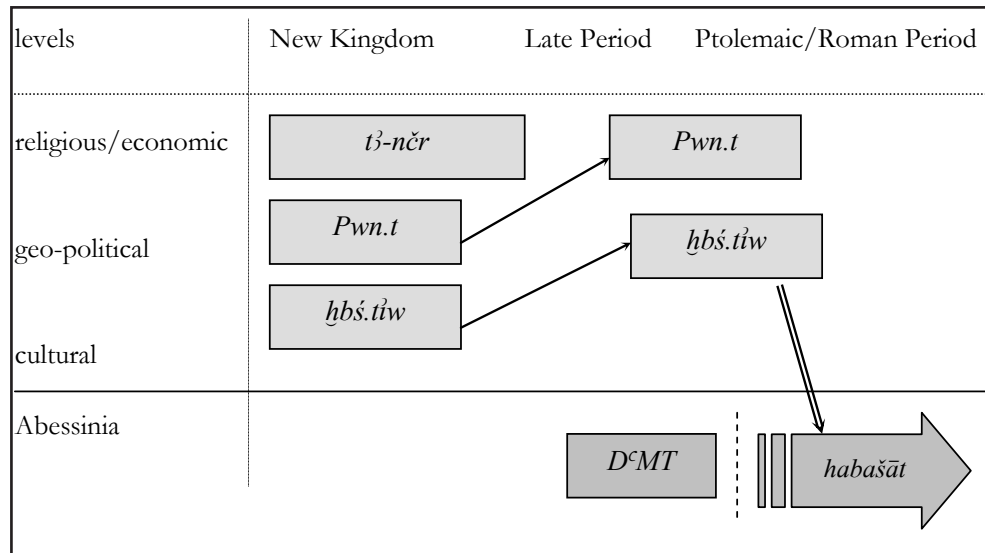
been established as a geographical and maybe also political term long before the Hittites entered the scene. Originally, *Hatti* was the name of a people that settled in Anatolia before the arrival of the first IndoEuropeans there and has left traces of their language (“*Hattian*” in academic literature) in Hittite rituals. This is an important point, for it may help to understand the mechanisms involved in the borrowing of Eg. *ḥbš.ti* > *ḥabašāt*. Like *Hatti* for central Anatolia, *ḥbš.ti* must have been a very long established name for the inhabitants of the Red Sea coast, going back at least to the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C., that is substantially before the first South Arabian people migrated to Abessinia. This explains, why the expression <D’MT> was not passed on. Another reason may be the distinction between *cultural* and *political* entity, which applies for *nesumnili* vs. *batti* likewise.

	Anatolia	Abessinia
Political	Hatti	Pwnt; later D’MT
Cultural	Nesumnili	<i>ḥbš.ti</i> > <i>ḥabašāt</i>

There is, however, one difference: in Anatolia, the political term has become dominant, in Abessinia on the other hand, it was the culturally determined expression. Why is that so? The answer is, there was no political entity in Anatolia before the Hittites, at least no “kingdom” of significance to the neighbouring cultures in Mesopotamia, but very much so in Abessinia. It would of course be naïve to think of a Puntite “empire”, but nevertheless, hieroglyphic sources make reference to one or several Puntite rulers. It seems, that in Egyptian <*Pwnt*> originally was the geo-political term, <*ḥbš.ti*> the cultural and *t3-nčr* “*gods-land*” the economic one (Punt as the main source for incense). It is only natural, that the people of D’MT did not chose either of the last two mentioned. Obviously, as they saw themselves, the fact that some foreigners located the birthplace of certain gods in their country, must have been rather marginal. Why *Pwnt*, with its clear ethnical, linguistic and political character contrary to D’MT was discarded, needs no further explanation, especially in view of it having become some sort of legendary land in Ptolemaic minds.

From all this, it follows that *ḥabašāt* was exclusively used as a political term for the Aksumite kingdom, i.e., the empire following D’MT.





## 5. The Archaeological Perspective

More reason for advocating an Egyptian loanword come from archaeological evidence. The most telling argument in favour of an Egyptian etymology of *habašāt* is, apart from the lack of a Semitic one, the fact, that trade flourished between Egypt and Abessinia, which makes linguistic contact very likely. Contrary to borrowings, trade goods has the big advantage, that they can easily be traced in the archaeological record and for the most part imported items can be ascertained with considerable certainty.<sup>27</sup> By the middle of the third century B.C., the Ptolemaic sphere of influence at the Red Sea coast has advanced as far as *Berenike-kata-Sabas* and *Berenike-epi-deires* at the Bab el-Mandeb.<sup>28</sup> The reason for an intensified Egyptian activity in Abessinia<sup>29</sup> is a change in military technology. War elephants became increasingly important (Diodor III 36:3; Strabon XVII 789) and whereas the Seleucids had easy access to Indian elephants, the Ptolemies had to make great efforts to obtain the African species.<sup>30</sup> The kingdom of Meroe blocked the

27 H. Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East*, Boulder 1994; J. Phillips, *Egyptian and Nubian material from Ethiopia and Eritrea*, in: *SARS Newsletter* 9, 1995, 2-11; J. S. Phillips, *Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia*, in: Z. Hawass (Hrsg.), *Egypt at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Egyptology II*, Cairo 2000, 434-442.

28 W. Huss, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit 332-30 v. Chr.*, München 2001, p. 856, map.

29 M. Rostowzew, *Zur Geschichte des Ost- und Südhandels im ptolemäisch-römischen Ägypten*, in: *APF* 4, 1908, 298-315; R. Delbrueck, *Südasiatische Seefahrt im Altertum*, in: *BJ* 155f., 1955f., 32-35.

30 This even led to the borrowing of a Niger-Kordofan word for "elephant" in the specific sense of "war elephant" (*t/nhr*), see F. Breyer, *Die altägyptische Etymologie von*

way by land, therefore, the routes via the Red Sea had to be reactivated.<sup>31</sup> Bases and ports along the coast were reopened or founded: Philopera / Mersa Gawasis (Strabon XVI 769), Berenike Troglodytike on the latitude of Philae (Plinius nat. hist. VI 168)<sup>32</sup> and Ptolemais Theron (Strabon XVI 770; Pithom-Stela 23 sq.), which can probably be identified with Mersa Aqiq near the Sudanese-Eritrean border<sup>33</sup>. The “*Monumentum Adulitanum*” (RIÉ Nr. 276)<sup>34</sup> even suggests some direct political influence, otherwise, the erection of a Ptolemaic royal inscription could not be explained. The Egyptian Horus-stela found by J. BRUCE in Aksum points in the same direction<sup>35</sup>.

Finally, there is an argument, which combines archaeology and philology. On certain Ethiopian megaliths of unknown date, we can find reliefs depicting a set of symbols. One of them is a special form of dagger, which also occurs once in Egyptian sources (CG28037; “*Wörterbuch*” card Nr. 27732600), accompanied by the word *ḥbs(tiw)*. It seems reasonable to suppose a reading “*the Abessinian (dagger)*” here. The form of this weapon is very unegyptian and has no parallels in the Ancient Near East either. It is worth mentioning here, that the ruler of Punt carries a very similar dagger on the reliefs from Deir el-Bahari.

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up the above mentioned arguments, it can be said, that many points speak in favour of an Egyptian etymology of ḥabašāt “Abessinia”. First of all, there is no convincing Semitic etymology proposed so far. Secondly, there is a

griechisch ελεφαντ = „Elefant“ und lateinisch *ebur* = Elfenbein, in: A. Loprieno & S. Bickel, *Ägyptiaca Helvetica* 19, 2003, 251-76.

31 G. W. Murray, Troglodytica: The Red Sea littoral in Ptolemaic Times, in: GJ 133, 1967, 24-33; S. E. Sidebotham, Ports of the Red Sea and the Arabian-Indian Trade, in: MBAH 5, 1986, 16-36; J. Desanges, Rome et les riverains de la mer Rouge au III<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère, in: Ktèma 9, 1984, 249-260; W. Huss, Die antike Mittelmeerwelt und Innerafrika bis zum Ende der Herrschaft der Karthager und der Ptolemäer, in: H. Duchardt et al. (Hrsg.), Afrika, Köln 1989, 1-29; D. Lorton, The Supposed Expedition of Ptolemy II to Persia, in: JEA 57, 1971, 160-164.

32 K. Sethe, in: RE III.1, 1897, 280f. s.v. Berenike Troglodytike und D. Meredith, Berenice Troglodytica, in: JEA 43, 1957, 56-70.

33 M. Cremaschi, A. D’Alessandro, R. Fattovich, M. Piperno, Gash Delta Archaeological Project: 1985 Field Season, in: Nyame Akuma 27, 1986, 45-48; J.W. Crowfoot, Some Red-Sea Ports in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, in: The Geographical Journal 37, 1911, 523-550; J. Desanges, Recherches sur l’activité des Méditerranéens aux confins de l’Afrique, Rom 1978, 274.

34 See É. Bernand, RIÉ III, Paris 2000, 26-32.

35 H. Sternberg-el Hotabi, Die verschollene Horusstele aus Aksum, in: H. Behlmer (Hrsg.), Quarentes Scintiam. Festgabe für Wolfhart Westendorf zu seinem 70. Geburtstag, Göttingen 1994, 189-191.

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phonologically possible Egyptian equation, which is morphologically transparent in the matrix language and also fits semantically. Furthermore, close examination of the Egyptian vocabulary alone suggests a shift from *ḥbs.tiw* “the bearded ones” to “*the Abessinians*”. Finally, archaeological as well as textual sources prove close economic relations between Egypt and Abessinia, which forms the basis of linguistic contact.