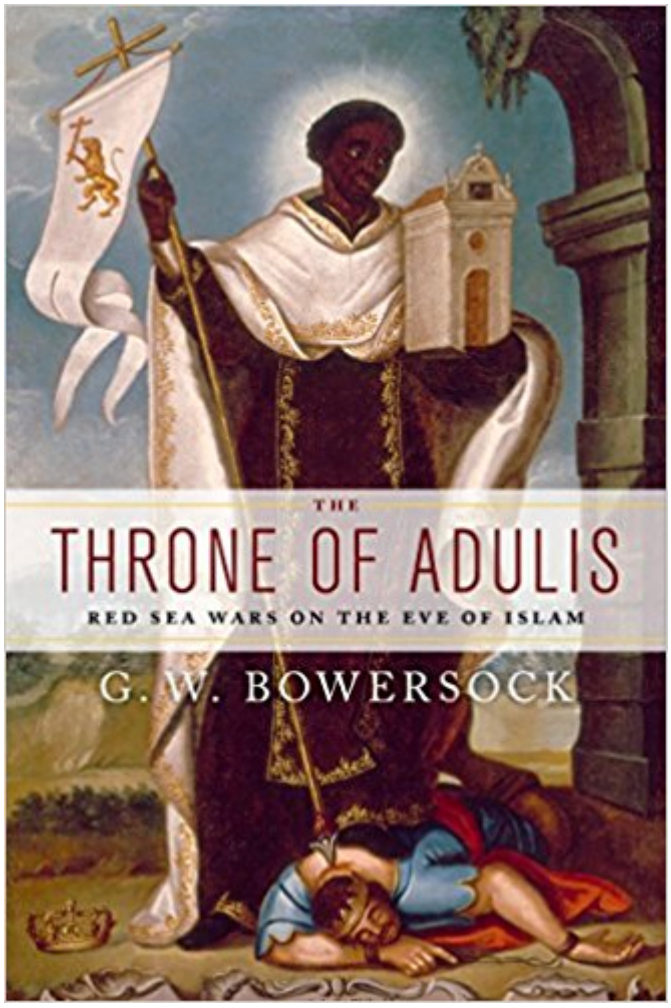
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The Throne Of Adulis: Red Sea Wars On The Eve Of Islam (Emblems Of Antiquity)



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Synopsis

Just prior to the rise of Islam in the sixth century AD, southern Arabia was embroiled in a violent conflict between Christian Ethiopians and Jewish Arabs. Though little known today, this was an international war that involved both the Byzantine Empire, which had established Christian churches in Ethiopia, and the Sasanian Empire in Persia, which supported the Jews in what became a proxy war against its longtime foe Byzantium.Our knowledge of these events derives largely from an inscribed marble throne at the Ethiopian port of Adulis, meticulously described by a sixth-century Christian merchant known as Cosmas Indicopleustes. Using the writings of Cosmas and a wealth of other historical and archaeological evidence from the period, eminent historian G. W. Bowersock carefully reconstructs this fascinating but overlooked chapter in pre-Islamic Arabian history. The flashpoint of the war, Bowersock tells us, occurred when Yusuf, the Jewish king of Himyar, massacred hundreds of Christians living in Najran. The Christian ruler of Ethiopia, Kaleb, urged on by the Byzantine emperor Justin, led a force of 120,000 men across the Red Sea to defeat Yusuf. But when the victorious Kaleb--said to have retired to a monastery-left behind weak leaders in both Ethiopia and Himyar, the Byzantine and Persian empires expanded their activity in the Arabian territory. In the midst of this conflict, a new religion was born, destined to bring a wholly unanticipated resolution to the power struggle in Arabia.The Throne of Adulis vividly recreates the Red Sea world of Late Antiquity, transporting readers back to a remote but pivotal epoch in ancient history, one that sheds light on the collapse of the Persian Empire as well as the rise of Islam.

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Customer Reviews

The 'Emblems of Antiquity' series by OUP presents aspects of ancient history for the general reader by focusing on a particular object from antiquity and teasing out its ramifications for the period in question. Glen Bowersock's study of the throne of Adulis fulfils this remit admirably. The subject matter of the book is summarized succinctly in the `Book Description' given above (taken from the dust-jacket). It is a fascinating micro-history of a little known period in ancient history, and readers should not expect more. While Bowersock does draw out the wider implications of the period for the religious and political history of the middle east, the book is not designed to be a general introduction to such matters, for which the interested reader can readily go elsewhere. What the book does do is present for the general reader the findings of painstaking research into historical events for which the literary record is largely non-existent. As such, the ancient historian is forced to fall back upon other types of evidence, and to combine these in order to reconstruct events. The backbone of the present work is a 16th century manuscript copy of a work written by a Byzantine traveller in the 6th century, who copied out the inscription on a ceremonial throne (the 'Throne of Adulis') which is now lost. In order to supplement this scant material, various sources are called upon: inscriptions written in ancient Ethiopian, coinage (always crucial in ancient history), entries in late Byzantine encyclopedias, and much more. On the one hand the reader is left with a very vivid picture of how tenuous our hold on the past really is; on the other hand we are shown how much can be salvaged by the careful work of scholars whose work we might otherwise be tempted to deride as trivial and of no practical application. Although the subject matter alone is enthralling, the general reader would in addition be hard pressed to find a more compelling illustration of the methods of the ancient historian.

A historical tour de force, touching on many fascinating topics, above all the existence of a major Jewish kingdom in southwestern Arabia, the Himyarite realm of sixth-century Yemen, unrecognized until recent decades and now becoming better known in large part because of Bowersock's research and writing. This is also an enjoyable read, for both amateur and professional

historians.Michael L. Bates, Ph.D.Curator Emeritus of Islamic CoinsThe American Numismatic Society

Bought this book in order to obtain more knowledge about enigmatic Jewish kingdom of Arabia and its relations with Ethiopian Empire. I have to admit that author has a good knowledge of the historical sources and modern theories about their meaning. He gets many pieces of information and makes the convincing conclusion about the geography, peoples and states. His explanations of the political and commercial interests of the world powers of that time, help to understand better the course of history. I like the book, but gave it just 3 stars due to the author's writing style, which is rather difficult to follow (I am not a native English speaker). I feel there are too many repetitions and logical circles in some places, while other are sketchy at best. Too little is said about the Jewish kingdom itself and no explanation given about King's Yusuf bloody hostility towards Arabic Christians. historical and Church accounts taken without proper critical reading - so a reader gets a feeling if some 'mad king' actions. Also there is no much explanations of the relations between Arabic tribe confederations and Arabic jewish (Christian) kingdoms.Having said that, I recommend this book for the reading to anyone, interested in the historical background at the eve of Islam. But I suggest that such a reader be ready for not 'easy reading' with this book.

Despite its modest size the book is geared to the academic set who are already familiar with the obscure kingdoms and personalities who dominated the Red Sea in the 4th and 5th centuries. The author's writing style doesn't help either, rattling off place names and personages with modest background information. It does shed some light onto little-known aspects about the region; namely the amazing reach of Hellenistic culture to the far reaches of the known world, rise of Christianity in Ethiopia that defined its culture and pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian settlement in Arabia now obliterated and purposely forgotten, whose influences heralded the sudden decline of polytheism among the Arabs and set the stage for the meteoric rise of Islam. Not recommended as a primer, unless you're ready to Google every name and place mentioned.

Excellent book by a leading historian of the period. Covers a relatively obscure corner of history.

great history on aksumite civilization

slow reading-a better background here is more helpful but a smooth writeronly wish those early

people were nt arians

Excellent book showing the run up to the birth of islam so different from the myths.

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