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Dissertation Abstract

The Issues of ʾAggabāb (Classic Gǝʿaz Grammar) According to the Tradition of Qene Schools

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HIRUIE ERMIAS, The Issues of ʾAggabāb (Classic Gǝʿaz Grammar) According to the Tradition of Qǝne Schools, PhD Dissertation in Ethiopian Studies, Faculty of Humanities at the University of Hamburg, defended on 20 February 2019.

In Ethiopia, the qǝne schools are the most important centres for the study of the Gǝʿaz language. The study has two major sections, sawāsǝw and qǝne. Sawāsǝw deals with the grammatical aspects of the language while qǝne is specifically concerned with composing and reciting qǝne ‘Gǝʿaz poetry’.

Sawāsǝw has four distinct parts which are known as gǝss, rǝbǝ qǝmr, rǝbǝ goşǝ, and ʾaggabǝb. According to the documented tradition of the schools, ʾaggabǝb is the final and the most essential part of the grammatical study of Gǝʿaz. It deals with various linguistic elements of which the grammar of the language is constituted. In the qǝne schools, studying ʾaggabǝb is one of the five requirements for graduating in qǝne and the Gǝʿaz language.

In this work, two hundred and thirty-four linguistic elements are categorized into various divisions and subdivisions. In accordance with the tradition of ʾaggabǝb, the elements are classified into three groups: ʿAbiyy ʾaggabǝb, Nǝʾus ʾaggabǝb, and Daqiq ʾaggabǝb.

However, from the perspective of modern linguistics, these elements can be grouped into seven lexical categories, namely Adverbs, Conjunctions, Prepositions, Relative Pronouns, Interrogative Pronouns, Interjections, and Particles. The purpose of this research is to discuss what ʾaggabǝb is and to compare the main issues within the perspectives of various scholars. Thus, to give the study a present-day relevance, the elements are recategorized and analysed within a linguistic perspective.

The particular focus of ʾaggabǝb encompasses the etymologies, meanings, and grammatical functions of the elements included in the categories mentioned above. It also touches upon rules concerning sentence structure, pronunciation, word construction as well as prefixation and suffixation.

The other important feature of the study is that it provides ample evidence, with examples to illustrate each theory. Of course, in the traditional teaching the evidence is mostly mentioned without reference to sources and the sources are not easy to identify. Thus, one of the challenging tasks in the writing of this dissertation was to detect the correct sources of a considerable number of quotations, and to provide fitting textual evidence for the
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Theories which lack evidence. Finally, to make the study more transparent and understandable, a relevant textual source is given for each theory or analysis.

The tradition of the schools maintains that the introduction of the existing Gǝǝʾaz grammar ʾaggabāb goes back to fifteenth-century scholars. Thus, it can be identified as a classical grammar of Gǝǝʾaz.

The knowledge which has come down to our time comes through oral transmission. Even today, the methodology which is applied in the schools is based on oral teaching.


The Chronicle of John of Nikiu is an important source for the history of the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs, as well as for the history of Late Antiquity in general. It was composed by a Coptic bishop, John, in the seventh century in Egypt and tells the history of the world starting from Adam and Eve till the author’s time. The first part of the Chronicle relies on diverse sources and offers an impression of the scope of literary works available to the author of the Chronicle. The second part is, however, an account written down by an eyewitness to the Islamic conquest and thus represents a highly valuable historical document.

The original language of the Chronicle is still debatable. There are arguments for Coptic as well as for Greek. Presumably around the twelfth century the text was translated into Arabic. In 1601 it was translated into Ethiopic and, at the very end of the nineteenth century, into Amharic. According to the current state of knowledge, only these two versions, Ethiopic and Amharic, have survived. The Chronicle consists of 122 chapters prefaced with an Introduction and a Table of Contents with short descriptions of chapters and followed by a Conclusion and a Colophon. However, the latter belongs exclusively to the Ethiopic version and only contains information on the circumstances of the translation into Ethiopic.

The complete text of the Chronicle was published and translated for the first time by Hermann Zotenberg in 1883 on the basis of two manuscripts (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien 123 and London, British Library, Or. 818). An English translation was published by Robert Henry Charles in 1916, and is based on Zotenberg’s edition. Since that time the number of available witnesses to the Ethiopic version of the Chronicle has