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Vignette:

Gold coin of King Aphilas, early third century CE, as drawn by A. Luegmeyer after the coin in Rennau collection. Weight 2.48 grams, diameter 17 mm.

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Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA is the twenty-fifth since the journal's founding in 1998. It is also the thirteenth issue I have worked on as editor-in-chief, one more than that of founder Siegbert Uhlig. The present time, however, does not lend itself to celebrations of any sort. The global political crisis and the situation in the Horn of Africa are having a deep impact on the scholarly community, which appears divided and radicalized on opposite or increasingly diverging positions as never before. The growing influence of diaspora communities is at times marked by waves of resurgent nationalism. The challenge posed by main-stream policy in countries of established scholarly traditions gives less and less space to small fields—as is the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies. The consequent lack of resources triggers the fragmentation of the scholarly scene. New balances based on mutual legitimation and acknowledgement of a common scholarly method are not obvious. The consequence of this complex situation, which reflects global changes, is that scholarly and academic freedom can be put at risk. Of all priorities envisaged in the mission of AETHIOPICA, preservation of academic freedom along with scholarly quality has been, is, and will remain the top priority of the journal.

I regret that in the past, and still now, the lack of available qualified authors has prevented AETHIOPICA from duly commemorating distinct colleagues and researchers recently passed away who were more than deserving of an obituary. I would like to remember at least some of them here, by name, as a very modest tribute to their work and memory: Johannes Launhardt (1929–2019), Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1930–2020), Steffen Wenig (1934–2022), Girma Fisseha (1941–2020).

To end on a positive note, three colleagues active in Ethiopian and Eritrean studies have received important awards this year, and we would like to mention them here: Samantha Kelly (Professor of Medieval History at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, also on our International Editorial Board), has won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title 2020, and the African Studies Review Prize for the Best Africa-focused Anthology or Edited Collection 2021, for her *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2020); Verena Krebs (Junior-Professorin für Mittelalterliche Kulturräume at Ruhr-Universität Bochum) has received the Dan David Prize for her *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); and Massimo Zaccaria (Professore Associato in Storia e Istituzioni dell'Africa at Università degli Studi di Pavia) has received the Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi award of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 'per la Storia ed Etnologia dell'Africa'. To all of them—the warmest congratulations from AETHIOPICA!

MARLENE GUSS-KOSICKA, *Die Verbalsysteme des Amharischen und Tigrinischen: Eine vergleichende Analyse*, Studien zum Horn von Afrika, 7 (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2019). xviii, 336 pp. Price: €69.80. ISBN: 978-3-896-45687-8.

The idea behind the book, which is Marlene Guss-Kosicka's PhD thesis, is as simple as it is insightful: to juxtapose the verbal systems of two Ethiopian Semitic languages, Amharic and Təgrəñña, and compare them meticulously, form by form, construction by construction. Taking chiefly the form-first approach, the author expertly guides the reader through an impressive gamut of verbal constructions found in the two languages and offers an account of their meaning(s). Guss-Kosicka is not working in a vacuum here as her monograph stands firmly on the shoulders of two giants: Gideon Goldenberg, who wrote (in Hebrew) *Ma'arāḥāt haz-zəmannīm hā-'amhārīt* ('The Amharic tense-system'), PhD Dissertation, The Hebrew University (1966); and Rainer M. Voigt, the author of *Das tigrinische Verbalsystem*, Marburger Studien zur Afrika- und Asienkunde, Serie A, Afrika, 10 (Berlin: Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, 1977). As distinct from Voigt's monograph, Guss-Kosicka's is much more user-friendly; as distinct from Goldenberg's, it is written in a more accessible language. But the book's backbone, the basic conceptualization of and approach to the verbal systems of the two languages, goes back to their works. The main contribution of Guss-Kosicka's monograph lies in the contrastive and comparative character of her investigation, which should further our understanding of the structure of Amharic and Təgrəñña, also against the background of other Semitic languages (p. 5). Alongside Shimelis Mazengia's *Nominalization via Verbal Derivation: Amharic, Tigrinya and Oromo*, Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, 99 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015)—which adds the third major Ethiopian language, Oromo—it is the sole work to compare the two languages in such an extensive manner.

The book falls into nine chapters (including a succinct Introduction), followed by a Bibliography and an Index. The Bibliography is divided into sections comprising primary (Amharic and Təgrəñña separately) and secondary literature. A detailed Table of Contents is preceded by a Content Overview, which gives the reader a quick idea of the composition and subject matter of the book. Chapters 2–5 deal with the formal and functional analysis of the five principal parts of the Amharic and Təgrəñña verb: perfective, gerund, imperfective, jussive, and imperative. These are studied in their own right, and also as they occur in combination with the copula and auxiliary verbs, as well as in conditional sentences. The other four chapters are devoted to periphrastic constructions involving the participle and the infinitive, to relative verbs, to headless relative clauses followed directly by a copula, and, finally, to cleft sentences. The major-

ity of the chapters and some larger sections end with a summary where Guss-Kosicka changes her angle of vision, now seeking not formal but functional correspondences between the Amharic and Təgrəñña verbal forms and constructions. All these correspondences are displayed in convenient tables.

For her study, the author has collected example sentences from Amharic and Təgrəñña prose fiction, ranging from the beginning of the twentieth century onward. Additionally, numerous example sentences have been drawn from Voigt (above all else), Wolf Leslau, Goldenberg, Marcel Cohen, Olga Kapeliuk, and Franz Praetorius.¹ Since their grammatical works constitute a major source of examples, I was wondering whether they should not have been included in the primary literature section, on a par with the Ethiopian fiction. All Amharic and Təgrəñña examples are very carefully transliterated: I have found only one misspelling in this 336-page work.

Despite the many positive aspects of the monograph, there are some points that require special consideration. I will first deal with three general issues, on both the formal and functional sides of the Amharic and Təgrəñña verbal systems, later zooming in for focused discussion on one specific point. The number of verbal forms and constructions (called both *Konstruktionen* and *Bildungen*; do these refer to the same kind of linguistic object?) listed by Guss-Kosicka is astonishing. In this respect, says the author, the two Ethiopian Semitic languages are the richest among the Semitic languages (p. 5). Without seeking to undermine this statement, it should be noted, however, that the status of many of the verbal constructions as constituting a distinct unit of language is not always clear. The question is whether some of the allegedly distinct constructions should not better be regarded as one and the same construction, but ‘inflected’ for negation and tense/aspect. To take one example. The Təgrəñña construction *zə-säbbər ’əyyu* (‘that breaks’; p. 237) is negated by means of negating the copula, *zə-säbbər ’ay-konü-n* (‘that does not break’; p. 242). The negative form is described as a negated variant of the positive (‘Negiertes *zə-säbbər ’əyyu*’) but presented in the list of constructions as if it were just another form on a par with the positive. How many distinct constructions do we have here? Is the negative merely to be seen as a variety of the positive, or better as a semantically independent entity with its own distinct ontological status? This issue is clearly rele-

¹ W. Leslau, *Reference Grammar of Amharic* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995); M. Cohen, *Traité de langue amharique (Abyssinie)*, Travaux et mémoires de l’Institut d’ethnologie, 24 (Paris: Institut d’ethnologie, 1936); O. Kapeliuk, *Nominalization in Amharic*, Aethiopistische Forschungen, 23 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1988); F. Praetorius, *Die amharische Sprache* (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1879).

vant to Guss-Kosicka's characterization of the verbal systems as being quantitatively the richest within Semitic.

A second issue that I would have liked Guss-Kosicka to spell out at the beginning is to explain which grammatical categories, tense or aspect or both, she is appealing to account for the meaning conveyed by the Amharic and Təgrəñña verbs and verbal constructions. And this is not a mere matter of terminology since it has a profound bearing on the semantic analysis of the verbal systems. In the view of the ongoing debate among Ethiopicists on the grammatical categories of the Amharic verb, this issue should have been explicitly thematized.

The third issue concerns the use of linguistic books as a source of examples, and the time span over which the example sentences were produced. According to the list of primary sources, the oldest literary work from which the author has drawn examples is *Ləbb wälläd tarik* (1908), the first Amharic work of fiction.² But in the monograph we run across example sentences taken from Praetorius (e.g. pp. 58, 77 (2 ×), 95 (2 ×), 131) whose *Die amharische Sprache* was published in 1879, some thirty years earlier. The bulk of his examples, in turn, come from the eighteenth and the first seven decades of the nineteenth century, such as the Abu Rumi Bible (editions from 1829, 1864–1865, 1871–1873). As a result, some of Guss-Kosicka's objects of analysis go back much deeper in the history of Amharic than 1908. Any diachronic study, as she mentions in the Introduction (p. 4), is beyond the confines of her monograph. This begs the question whether it is methodologically justifiable to conduct a *synchronic* investigation on a living language over such a long time span. To my mind even the 111-year period of 1908–2019 is too long to count as a 'snapshot', especially in light of the fact that the development of Amharic as a written language gained momentum only in the second half of the twentieth century. The same consideration applies to Təgrəñña even though here the time span of Guss-Kosicka's study rarely goes much beyond one hundred year (mainly due to examples taken from Voigt's *Das tigrinische Verbalsystem*).

The issue of taking example sentences from linguistic books requires further comment here. It seems to me that any examples provided whose ultimate source is unknown require an additional confirmation, whether in the form of sentences culled from a book or elicited from an informant. Here is one such an instance (in Amharic) where the author should have been on her guard.

² Afäwärc Gäbrä Iyäsus, ልብ ወለድ ታሪክ (*Ləbb wälläd tarik*, 'A heart-born story') (Roma: Tipografia della Casa Editrice Italiana, 1908).

1) *mənalbat şəbaḥ bā-zi sä'at-əzi təmälisä 'əḵäwwən*, 'Vielleicht werde ich morgen um diese Zeit wieder zurück(gekehrt) sein' ('Perhaps I will have returned tomorrow at this time').³

Guss-Kosicka is the fourth in the genealogical line of authorities who quote this sentence—and not without grounds. For the construction gerund + *yəḵäwwən* illustrated with sentence (1) above and expressing future perfect (*Futur II* in her terminology) seems to exist only in the pages of linguistic books. Neither Voigt nor Guss-Kosicka confirm the existence of this construction by quoting a primary source. Nor is the construction recognized by two Təgrəñña native speakers whom I consulted. This need not mean that Francesco da Offeio, Mauro da Leonessa, Voigt, and Guss-Kosicka have conjured up a phantom construction, but it does mean that it is worth checking with (several) native speakers and/or in written sources to ascertain whether it is (still) in use. The construction should be furnished with an appropriate comment.

A certain amount of caution, and involvement of native speakers (or other sources), is also indispensable when drawing examples from more recent linguistic publications. Leslau's *Reference Grammar of Amharic* is a case in point. To illustrate the Amharic construction gerund + *yəhonall* in the future perfect meaning—the counterpart of Təgrəñña's gerund + *yəḵäwwən*—Guss-Kosicka uses one of three examples provided by Leslau:

2) *Alämu yägämmärəwən sərə əskahun čärrəso yəhonall* ('by now Alämu may have finished the work that he started').⁴

However, neither sentence (2) nor the other examples in Leslau's grammar do actually exemplify the future perfect, that is, relative past in the future (Leslau's third sentence fails too, but in a different manner). The sentence quoted in Guss-Kosicka's monograph refers to an action in the past, as the translation itself clearly shows. As excellent as Leslau's *Reference Grammar of Amharic* is, one must be on guard against uncritically accepting his example sentences. This is not the only place where he errs, especially when discussing the semantics of Amharic expressions. The question whether the Təgrəñña and Amharic constructions gerund + *yəḵäwwən/yəhonall* can express the true future perfect remains open and is worth studying.

³ Francesco da Offeio, *Grammatica della lingua Tigray* (Cheren: Tipografia cattolica, 1907), 175; Mauro da Leonessa, *Grammatica analitica della lingua Tigray con prefazione del P. G. Schmidt e con introduzione del comm. C. Conti-Rossini* (Roma: Tipografia poliglotta vaticana, 1928), 211; Voigt, op. cit., 179; book under review, 75.

⁴ Leslau, op. cit., 381; book under review, 75.

Finally, the functional analysis of the verbal systems—in fairness, an extremely challenging task—needs revision in a few places. Here I will provide one such instance: it concerns verbs of knowing and believing, which are mentioned in Guss-Kosicka's monograph in one go. But these two kinds of verbs are radically different in their behaviour; or rather the behaviour of the verb 'know that', also in the way it is negated, is singular. Here I refer the reader to Andrzej Bogusławski, who has written extensively about the uniqueness of this verb.⁵ On page 176, Guss-Kosicka examines a particular usage of the jussive and the imperative with verbs of knowing and believing 'in order to express two hypothetical alternatives', as in the following sentence:

3) *yəbla ayəbla alawqəmm* ('I don't know whether he has eaten or not', or 'whether he eats or not').⁶

Guss-Kosicka does not provide an example sentence for a verb of believing. And rightly so, because this type of construction can be used only with the verb of knowing and not at all with verbs of believing. The following sentences (made up by the reviewer) are absolutely infelicitous:

4) **yəmṭa ayəṃṭa amnallāhu* (*'I believe whether he will come or not')

5) **yəmṭa ayəṃṭa alamnəmm* (*'I don't believe whether he will come or not').

But being a verb of knowing is not in itself enough to sanction this construction; for the construction to be acceptable the verb of knowing must be *negated*, a fact which goes unmentioned in the book, even though it is evident from the examples provided in Amharic and Təgrəñña. The above construction with a conjoined positive and negative jussive (or imperative and jussive) followed by a negated verb of knowing expresses not merely two alternatives but the epistemic subject's ignorance as to which is correct.

The above criticisms do not, however, outweigh the positive aspects of Guss-Kosicka's monograph. It definitely delivers what the title announces: a decent and extremely informative comparative account of the verbal systems of Amharic and Təgrəñña. It is an essential reference for anyone dealing with the two languages, whether a student or a professional linguist.

Magdalena Krzyzanowska, Universität Hamburg

⁵ A. Bogusławski, *Science as Linguistic Activity, Linguistics as Scientific Activity* (Warszawa: Katedra Lingwistyki Formalnej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1998).

⁶ Leslau, op. cit., 351–352; book under review, 176. Literally 'he eats, he does not eat, I do not know'.