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**Review**

GIRMA Y. GETAHUN, *Advanced Amharic Lexicon: a Supplement to Concise Amharic-English Dictionaries*

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## Reviews

tiert in "Towards a Biography of Nizām al-Mulk" bisher wenig beachtete Quellen, die vor allem die Entstehung des Nachruhms des bedeutenden Seldschukenwesirs (1018–1092) beleuchten.

Graeco-Semita: J. BARR schlägt als Etymologie für das bisher ungeklärte ἄνθρωπος 'Mensch' das Wort ἄνθαξ 'Holzkohle' vor, das auch als Terminus für rote Edelsteine verwendet wird. Parallelen seien akkadische und hebräische Menschenbezeichnungen, die ebenfalls auf Farbbezeichnungen zurückgehen. – R. LOEWE möchte die griechische Interjektion ἄβαλε auf aramäische Etyma zurückführen.

Indices (Personen, Begriffe, hebräische, aramäische und griechische<sup>6</sup> Wörter, sowie Handschriften) runden diese würdige Geburtstagsgabe für einen bedeutenden Semitisten und Äthiopisten ab.

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GIRMA Y. GETAHUN, *Advanced Amharic Lexicon: a Supplement to Concise Amharic–English Dictionaries* = Arbeitsmaterialien zur Afrikanistik Bd. 3. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003. 398 pp. Price: € 49,90. ISBN: 3–8258–7045–6.

Girma's work is commendable for its many positive aspects. First of all it is an important addition to the constantly expanding field of Amharic lexicography.

In addition, with the amount of obscure and rare words it contains, this work will try to fill a unique niche. Besides its precise definitions, it contains numerous illustrative examples from Amharic folklore and folk-songs. This being the case the book is not without some major and minor shortcomings. I shall touch on both of these.

The author proposes ተዋላሽ *täwäṣə'o* and አዳጊ *adagi* as alternatives for አስተዋላሽ *astäwäṣə'o* and ታዳጊ *taddagi* (p. iv). Although this could be true from the semantic point of view, I think the latter forms are preferable because they already have a wider currency. One should give weight to such factors rather than grammatical correctness alone. Continuing his discussion the author writes that "... መተግበር *mätägbär* and ተሞ *täyyäbä* are problematic due to irregularity inherent in their formations" (p. iv). I don't understand what is the irregularity inherent in their formations. Although both words are loans from Gə'əz and English respectively, they follow the regular morphological rules of Amharic. In addition, this borrowing process should be encouraged since it is one of the regular devices for enriching the lexicon of a given language.

<sup>6</sup> Warum eigentlich nicht auch die anderen Sprachen?

The innovation one comes across in this dictionary is the use of a ‘double smart quote’ (“), used to signal a full or partial replacement of a term already given as an entry. This convention is difficult to get accustomed to because it digresses from the usual lexicographical works of Amharic. Instead of giving/encumbering the reader with the difficult task of decoding what the ‘smart quote’ stands for, it would be better to stick to the repetition of the concerned lexical entries.

Several entries contain definitions such as “a kind of plant, animal” etc. sometimes followed with a question mark. For instance አምባሳ *ambaza* was defined as “a kind of fish” (p. 182) instead of the more precise “a large fish with scaleless skin”. Such vague and general definitions should be avoided. Likewise ባንዳራ *bandura* was defined as “a kind of vegetable, okra?” (p. 138). However according to Kane (p. 922) ባንዳራ *bandura* is an Arabic term for ‘tomato’ (probably from the Italian *pomodoro*).

One can understand Girma’s desire to use etymological spellings. However, not all his etymological postulations appear to be correct. For instance ዐባይ *‘abbay* ‘Blue Nile’ (from ዐበይ *‘abbäyä* ‘to be greater’, Kane p. 1203) and አባይ *abay* ‘liar’ (from አበለ *abbälä* ‘promise falsely’, Kane 1191) are good examples of graphic minimal pairs. However, Girma presents them in an opposite way. Thus according to him i.e. ዐባይ *‘abay* is ‘liar’ (from ዐበለ *‘abbälä* ‘lied’, p. 194) and አባይ *abbay* is ‘the Nile’ (from ዐበይ *‘abbäyä* ‘became superior’, p. 197). This inversion was really a confounding one for me.

Regarding place names explanation should be given at the preface stating that these refer to pre-1991 Ethiopian regional divisions. This is because 15 years ago a new division which involves ክልል *källal* and ዞን *zon* was introduced. This is slowly leading to obsolescence of some regional names. This is evidenced by the young generation becoming perplexed when hearing names such as ሸዋ *Šäwa*, ኢሉባቦር *Illubabor* ወሊጋ *Wälläga*, etc. In addition, town names or localities should be specified in a unitary way. For instance ሆሳና *Hosa’ana* was defined as “... a name of town in southern Šäwa” (p. 4) while Hagere Selam was defined as “a name of town” (p. 8). Such general information is not helpful.

One major defect of the dictionary is the faulty hyphenation of numerous English words. These words instead of being written in full, were hyphenated by mistake, reflecting a draft version in which the words were divided. The frequency of this is such that it appears that there was no proof reading. For instance po-pular (p. 5), cou-ntry (p. 8), he-ad (p. 24) can be mentioned. There are also a few instances of unnecessary hyphenation of Amharic terms such as አግ መውሰኛ *ḥəgg mäwäsäñña* (p. 7) and እኩል *əkäl* (p. 147). Some cases of faulty Amharic phonetic transliterations such as *kfle* (p. iii), *hohyat* (p. 1) and *brädo* (p. 9) were also observed.

Terms deemed derogatory (pejorative) should be given their due attention. For instance it was mentioned that ቀጥጫ *q<sup>w</sup>əčā* is “... a cotton fabric ... manufactured in Qočč’, Wälamo (*sic.*)” (p. 120). The term Wälamo was considered to be pejorative and was replaced by the term Wälayta almost three decades ago. Likewise Beta Israel was defined as “name of the *Falasha* of Ethiopia” (p. 136)”. Instead the author could have modified it by writing “name of Ethiopian Jews (formerly known as *Falasha*)”. In addition, although ካይላ *kayla* is the “name of the Ethiopian Jews” (p. 236) it is perceived to be pejorative by members of this community and this should have been indicated in parentheses.

Some words have several meanings and sometimes these were skipped. For example *lattä* (p. 19) could also be ‘a cheater’ while *senber* (p. 71) has the additional meaning ‘bruise’. The term *säräbbä* (p. 63) is a loan of wider use in Amharic and it means ‘spiked volleyball’. ነጻጻጽ *näčäčäbba* (p. 174) is a term of insult for a white person. The term ሸንከራ *Šänk<sup>w</sup>ära* is not restricted only to sugar cane but is also a district in ሸዋ *Šäwa* province. The ethnic group ኮሪ *kore* (p. 224) is also known as ከራራ *k<sup>w</sup>äyra*.

Correct definitions are essential. Hence *sälləto* is ‘a thick bread’ and not a ‘hush puppy’ (p. 81) while ከለቻ (Or. *Kallača*) is not “a sacred object to be held in hand ...” (p. 223) but rather is a “phallic-like symbol worn on the forehead”. Beta Israel call their prayer house መስጊድ *mäsgid* or ጸሎት ቤት *šälot bet* and not መከራ *mäk<sup>w</sup>ära* (p. 37). (Although ምከራ *mək<sup>w</sup>arab* is possible, this term is not used by Ethiopian Jews.)

In many cases the origin of loan words was indicated while in several of them it is not. For the sake of uniformity an attempt should be made to indicate the source languages of all loan words. For instance መዲና *mädina* (p. 41) and ሱፍ *suf* (p. 79) are from Arabic, (p. 71) ሰቂቃው *säq<sup>w</sup>äqaw* is from Gəʿəz and ቦሌ *bole* (p. 126) plus አራራ *arera* (p. 185) are from Oromo.

Affixes should be marked properly by placing a hyphen before or after the concerned affix. For instance -ቴ *-te* in p. 144, -ቻ *-ča* in p. 157 and አ- *a-* in p. 177. Regarding affixes the matter which is not clear to me is the criterion for the selection of the above affixes and the exclusion of others.

Finally a word about the size of the book. The dictionary is very compact and as a result the number of words per line is a minimal one. It would have been preferable to enlarge its size for aesthetic reasons and also to reduce the numerous hyphenations.

Still I found Girma’s dictionary an invaluable tool in the study of Amharic. If some of the shortcomings are corrected it will have its special place in the study of the Amharic lexicon.

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