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Ancient features of Ancient Ethiopic*

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I will mean here by ‘ancient features of Ancient Ethiopic’ those linguistic elements which do not occur as a rule in standard Ancient Ethiopic (simply Ethiopic, or Ge^cez), and for which a presumption of antiquity is objectively based in the nature of their evidence. It is a kind of research that goes exactly the opposite direction of that on ‘post-classic Ge^cez’, first started by F. Praetorius, later on resumed by S. Strelcyn, W.K. Brzuski, M. Kropp, and quite recently by S. Weninger¹. Therefore, in principle at least, I am not going to

* The present article resumes and develops some points of a lecture on the paleographic, linguistic and philological features of Ancient Ethiopic (‘Gastvortrag’ “Charakteristika äthiopischer Handschriften: einige paläographische, sprachliche und philologische Daten”), given at the Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik of the Freie Universität Berlin, in May 2004, and of a paper delivered at the ‘12th Italian Meeting of Afroasiatic Linguistics’, Ragusa – Ibla, in June 2005. I would like to thank Prof. Paolo Marrassini, who read an earlier version of this article, for his suggestions and comments. – Abbreviations: *DAE* = ENNO LITTMANN, *Deutsche-Aksum Expedition, herausgegeben von der Generalverwaltung der königlichen Museen zu Berlin. Band IV. Sabäische, griechische, und altabessinische Inschriften* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1913); *EMML* = Ethiopian manuscripts microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa and for the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, St John’s Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minnesota; *RIÉ* = ÉTIENNE BERNAND, ABRAHAM JOHANNES DREWES, ROGER SCHNEIDER, *Recueil des Inscriptions de l’Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, 3 vols. (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1991–2000).

¹ Cf. MANFRED KROPP, “Arabisch-äthiopische Übersetzungstechnik am Beispiel der Zena Ayhud (Yosippon) und des Tarikä Wäldä ‘Amid’”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 136/2 (1986), pp. 314–46; STEFAN STRELCYN, “Recherches sur l’histoire du guèze postclassique et de l’amharique”, in *Congrès International des Africanistes. Deuxième Session. Dakar, 11–20 décembre 1967* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1972), pp. 199–214, which is the main title omitted by STEFAN WENINGER, *Das Verbalsystem des Altäthiopischen. Eine Untersuchung seiner Verwendung unter Berücksichtigung des Interferenzproblems* (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur – Mainz, Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission Band 47, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001), pp. 5 f.: cf. also the reviews by JOSEF TROPPEL, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 97/6 (2002), pp. 778–87; MANFRED KROPP, *Oriens Christianus*, 86 (2002), pp. 267–69; OLGA KAPELIUK, *Aethiopica*, 6 (2003), pp. 259–63; ALESSANDRO BAUSI, *Annali dell’Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”*, 63 (2003 [2004]), pp. 259–68, esp. p. 260, n. 4.

say something on assumed ‘archaic’ linguistic features of Ancient Ethiopic within Ethio-Semitic or in an even wider comparative perspective. As for ‘standard Ancient Ethiopic’, I will refer to Ethiopic as fixed both in current grammars and in the indigenous tradition itself². It is clear that the so defined ‘ancient features’, as certainly documented in relatively ‘ancient’ times, may represent ‘archaic’ forms, i.e. historically witnessed phases of diachronical developments within one unitary Ancient Ethiopic. But although this may be assumed as a privileged hypothesis, also other explanations may be advanced: in particular, if the nature of the evidence of the ‘ancient features’ does not allow to locate them along a consistent line of development, one could wonder whether apparently ‘ancient’ features might be better interpreted as dialectal variations (in turn, liable to be interpreted according to various factors).

As it is well-known, the most ancient evidence of Ancient Ethiopic lies (according to chronological order) in inscriptions, legends on coins, and texts written on MSS. We do also have transcriptions of terms in other languages, but to a very limited amount³. Even if certainly influenced by Greek models (as the existence itself of Greek

² Almost nothing of the pre-modern Ethiopic indigenous tradition is recorded; for the traditional pronunciation, cf. MARCEL COHEN, “La prononciation traditionnelle du guèze (éthiopien classique)”, *Journal Asiatique*, 17 (1921), pp. 217–69, with bibliography on pp. 238–47; EUGEN MITTWOCH, “Die traditionelle Aussprache des Aethiopischen”, *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalischen Sprachen*, 28 (1925), pp. 126–248 (also published as *Abessinische Studien*, Heft 1, Berlin und Leipzig: Verlag von Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1926); reviews by MARCEL COHEN, *Journal Asiatique*, 210 (1927), pp. 176–81; ID., *Bulletin de la Société Linguistique*, 27 (1926–27), pp. 176f.; PONTUS LEANDER, *Zeitschrift für Semitistik*, 7 (1929), pp. 110–12; IGNAZIO GUIDI, “Die traditionelle Aussprache des Aethiopischen”, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, N.F. 3 (1926), pp. 1903–8; CARL BROCKELMANN, “Zur Kritik der traditionellen Aussprache des Aethiopischen”, *Zeitschrift für Semitistik*, 7 (1929), pp. 205–13; cf. also EDWARD ULLENDORFF, *The Semitic Languages of Ethiopia. A Comparative Phonology* (London: Taylor’s (Foreign) Press, 1955), pp. 29–34; MAKONNEN ARGAW, *Matériaux pour l’étude de la prononciation traditionnelle du guèze* (Études éthiopiennes Mémoire 44, Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1984); for the indigenous grammatical thought, cf. MARTINO MARIO MORENO, “Struttura e terminologia del Sawāšew”, *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 8 (1949 [1950]), pp. 12–62; MARCEL COHEN and ROGER SCHNEIDER, “Le troisième chapitre de la Grammaire par Abbā Takla Māryām W.S.”, *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 13 (1954 [1955]), pp. 31–55, and 14 (1955–58 [1959]), pp. 7–27; LUIGI FUSELLA, “Work in progress on an unedited ‘Sewāšew’”, in SVEN RUBENSON (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies. University of Lund, 26–29 April 1982* (Addis Abeba: Institute of Ethiopian Studies – Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies – East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1984), pp. 61–66.

³ However, it is first starting from Ethiopic terms in Greek writing witnessed by the *Topographia Christiana* of Cosmas Indicopleustes that A. Dillmann reconstructed in

inscriptions demonstrates) and therefore not completely spontaneous, inscriptions keep all their importance, as they certainly date back to the Aksumite period⁴. Leaving aside numismatic evidence, which do not seem to offer substantial elements to linguistic analysis⁵, the last outline of the main features of epigraphical Ethiopic may be found in a contribution of 1991 by A.J. Drewes. This outline is intentionally meant as an integration to the few, but still very important pages of *DAE*, where E. Littmann synthetically summarised his conclusions on the subject in 1913⁶.

After shortly discussing fluctuation in pronouns and verbal forms referring to the Aksumite king⁷, Drewes concentrates on the differences “from the classical language of later times”, and points essentially to three phonetic and one

1890 a nominal *e*-ending in Ethiopic, cf. AUGUST DILLMANN, “Bemerkungen zur Grammatik des Geez und zur alten Geschichte Abessiniens”, *Sitzungsberichte der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 1 (1890), pp. 3–17, esp. pp. 1–8; also *DAE* p. 80 f. The later discovery of other terms in the new pseudo-trilingual inscription confirms the hypothesis (cf. *RIÉ* no. 270 bis, l. 37, ΣΟΥ^cATE and BEΔIE, with *ε*-ending, in correspondence with Ethiopic *swt* and *bdh*), while it is unlikely that *ε*-ending may represent there an *a*-accusative ending (*w^bbⁿ lmh^rm swt wbdh*, cf. *DAE* no. 7 = *RIÉ* no. 185 I, l. 25, and *RIÉ* no. 185 bis I, l. 60).

⁴ As it is well-known, we do not yet possess a fully satisfactory tool for the study of Ethiopic inscriptions: the new edition of *RIÉ* by A.J. Drewes and R. Schneider has considered all the inscriptions known to 1991, and given new important readings of those already published by ENNO LITTMANN in *DAE*, and again in “Äthiopische Inschriften”, in *Miscellanea Academica Berolinensia. Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Feier des 250jährigen Bestehens der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1950), vol. II/2, pp. 97–127. A number of problems, first of all the death of R. Schneider, have prevented till now the publication of the final volume of *RIÉ*, with translation and commentary of the non-Greek texts. Additional epigraphical documents, still awaiting a comprehensive study, have been published by LANFRANCO RICCI, “Iscrizioni rupestri dell’Eritrea”, *Rendiconti dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, s. 9, 5 (1994), pp. 691–701; and with the same main title, *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 42 (1998 [1999]), pp. 71–88; *ibid.*, 43 (1999 [2000]), pp. 133–51; *ibid.*, n.s. 1/1 (2002), pp. 63–84; *ibid.*, n.s. 2 (2003), pp. 51–76.

⁵ For an evaluation of recent attempts and further references, cf. ALESSANDRO BAUSI, “Numismatica aksumita, linguistica e filologia”, *Istituto Italiano di Numismatica. Annali*, 50 (2003 [2005]), pp. 157–75; ID., “Il *denarius* in Etiopia” (under press).

⁶ Cf. ABRAHAM JOHANNES DREWES, “Some features of epigraphical Ethiopic”, in ALAN S. KAYE (ed.), *Semitic Studies In honor of Wolf Leslau on the occasion of his eighty-fifth birthday November 14th, 1991*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), vol. I, pp. 382–91; and *DAE* pp. 79–82.

⁷ Cf. DREWES, “Some features”, p. 384 f., where the “curious fluctuation” is explained as due to “formal inertia”.

morphological features; he also deals with lexical problems, which I will not consider here⁸.

The first phonetic element consists in two possible cases of confusion between *s* and *ś*, well before its well-known emergence in later royal Aksumite inscriptions (*DAE* nos. 12, 13 and 14 = *RIÉ* nos. 193 and 194). While it should be noted that the first instance (*tl̄t̄* instead of the expected *s²ls* in the ‘new’ inscription of ʿĒzānā in South-Arabian writing, *RIÉ* no. 190, l. 34) could be simply due to graphic imitation of the middle and late Sabaeen form⁹, Drewes advances the hypothesis that indeed a confusion between *s* and *ś* may have taken place during Kālēb’s period, at least “in the dialect of the scribe” (*ʿsr̄ḥ* instead of the etymologically correct *ʿs²r̄ḥ*, in the inscription of Kālēb, *RIÉ* no. 191, l. 6). After new readings of *RIÉ* have ruled out Littmann’s hypothesis of confusion between *s* and *ś* in *nst/nst̄* (cf. *DAE* no. 7, l. 22, and p. 80), as the correct reading is *nkt* (*RIÉ* no. 185 II, l. 22)¹⁰, it seems clear that that remains the earliest possible example of exchange between *s* and *ś*¹¹.

⁸ Cf. DREWES, *Some features*, pp. 390 f.; for additional remarks on *dhr*, cf. also ALESSANDRO BAUSI, “La versione etiopica delle *Risposte canoniche* di Timoteo I attribuite a Pietro di Alessandria (*CPG* nr. 2520)” (under press).

⁹ Cf. A.F.L. BEESTON, *A Descriptive Grammar of Epigraphic South Arabian* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1962), p. 40, who gives “early Sabaeen” *s²lt̄*, *s²lt̄t̄*, and “middle and late Sabaeen” *tl̄t̄*, *tl̄t̄t̄*.

¹⁰ Cf. also ROGER SCHNEIDER, “Notes sur les inscriptions royales aksumites”, *Bibliotheca orientalis*, 44/5–6 (1987), cc. 599–616, esp. c. 603. The same may be said of the untenable etymologization of *śē²a* from *so²a*, cf. *DAE* no. 7 [= *RIÉ* no. 185 II], l. 23, no. 10 [= no. 188], l. 29, and p. 80; but DREWES’ statement, “Some features”, p. 390, n. 29, that, although the verb *śē²a* clearly means “to chase, to eradicate”, as it was recognized by Littmann, his etymology “cannot be maintained, because it would imply irregular correspondence of sibilants”, risks to be circular.

¹¹ Although not mentioned by Drewes, also in the case of the exchange between *s* and *d* which Littmann assumes in *ᶜdb/ᶜsb* (*DAE* no. 24 = *RIÉ* no. 196), it would be much more preferable to read *bḏ^c*, as suggested in *RIÉ* vol. I, p. 292; however, it must be noted that Littmann supposed a real phonetic assimilation of *s* to *b*, through the passage to *d* (*sic*), not a real alternation or confusion (cf. *DAE* p. 54, “müßte man also annehmen, daß *s* hier sporadisch zu *d* geworden wäre, durch partielle Assimilation des *s* an das *b*”). The study by DAVID L. ELIAS, “Ge^cez Consonantal Alternation in the Royal Aksumite Inscriptions”, in KATSUYOSHI FUKUI, EISEI KURIMOTO, MASAYOSHI SHIGETA (eds.), *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective. Papers of XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies. Kyoto 12–17 December 1997*, 3 vols. (Kyoto: Shokado Book Sellers, 1997), vol. I, pp. 423–30, is scarcely reliable: cf. p. 425, on the assumed variant spelling *s* / *d* in *DAE* no. 7 [= *RIÉ* no. 185 II], l. 16, which does not absolutely exist: cf. the extensive contribution by MAXIME RODINSON, “Les nouvelles inscriptions d’Axoum et le lieu de déportation des Bedjas”, *Raydān*, 4 (1981), pp. 97–

The second phonetic element is assimilation of the nasals *m* and *n* to a following consonant: not only *-m* before *b-*, as also Littmann had recognized (in particular, there are several examples of assimilation of the preposition ^ʾ*em-* before the following word *beḥēr*), but also *n* before labials, dentals and velars¹².

The third phonetic element is the reduction of *a* to *e* before laryngeals, not only in open syllable followed by *a*, but also in closed syllable, as it happens in *DAE* no. 11 = *RIÉ* no. 189, probably a dialectal peculiarity proper to the scribe of this inscription; anyway, it is a rather irregular feature¹³.

The most important element recalled by Drewes is the morphological variation of the personal independent pronouns in the inscription of Kālēb's son, W^cZB (*RIÉ* no. 192), where the third person masculine singular is *h^ʾt* (ll. 3 and 4), the plural is *hmnt* (l. 9), and probably *hm* (l. 56) stays for the third person feminine singular pronoun: these forms may be almost certainly considered as dialectal, and have been compared with Tigre *hetu*-form of the third person masculine singular pronoun¹⁴.

In *DAE*, Littmann had already listed other elements, most of which still keep their validity. I will recall here only some of them¹⁵, either because Littmann made reference to the evidence of ancient MSS in interpreting them, and/or because they may deserve attention in the light of new data.

116; and the later study by STEFAN WENINGER, "Zur Realisation des ḍ (< *ḍ) im Altäthiopischen", *Die Welt des Orients*, 29 (1998), pp. 147 f.

¹² Cf. DREWES, "Some features", pp. 383 and 386 f.; cf. already EDUARD KÖNIG's *Neue Studien über Schrift, Aussprache und allgemeine Formenlehre des Aethiopischen* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1877), p. 98; the phenomenon was recognized by FRANZ PRAETORIUS, *Grammatica Aethiopica* (Karlsruhe – Leipzig: H. Reuther, 1886), p. 129, who wrongly denied its existence in MSS (cf. below), "In inscriptionibus, at non manuscriptis, litera *m* vocis *em* sequenti *b* assimilatur"; *DAE* p. 81, and p. 82, for the now untenable explanation of ^ʾ*eza* (*DAE* no. 9, l. 20) as a scribal error for ^ʾ*enza*; cf. also now ALEXANDER SIMA, "Abschied vom 'herrlichen' Land Mṣ. Eine alte crux in der Trilingue des ʿĒzānā (RIE 185 und RIE 185bis)", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 93 (2003), pp. 227–31.

¹³ According to DREWES, "Some features", pp. 387 f., and also to *DAE* p. 80, where the phoneme *h* is considered a trigger; Littmann read ^ʾ*ehzābihomu* also in *DAE* no. 10 [= *RIÉ* no. 188], l. 23, and p. 80, but the reading is not confirmed by *RIÉ*, which reads ^ʾ*ahzābihomu*.

¹⁴ Cf. DREWES, "Some features", p. 389; the reference to Tigre *hetu* has been advanced by ROGER SCHNEIDER, "Trois nouvelles inscriptions royales d'Axoum", in *IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici (Roma, 10–15 Aprile 1972)*, 2 vols. (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Anno 371 – 1974, Quaderno 191, Problemi attuali di scienza e di cultura, Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), vol. I (*Sezione storica*), pp. 767–86, esp. p. 779.

¹⁵ I will leave aside some other peculiarities, among which *-iya*, not *-ē*, as accusative form of *i*-ending nouns; use of the *-ni* postponed particle as conjunction (but always

The most regular feature observed by Littmann is the missing lengthening of *a* to \bar{a} before laryngeals in closed syllables (one of the few cases for which he quotes parallels in MSS¹⁶), with some exceptional lengthenings in final syllable (starting from ʾaytmawwā in *DAE* no. 10 [= *RIÉ* no. 188], l. 5, and no. 11 [= no. 189], l. 4), and loss of laryngeal in final position (*DAE* no. 9 [= *RIÉ* no. 187], l. 4, and no. 11 [= no. 189], l. 6)¹⁷. There is no need to say that

in presence of *wa-*); negative particle ʾay- , but also ʾi- (and ʾey- , cf. below); as to syntax, the object may be placed before the verb, direct speech before the verb “to say”, and *za-* genitive before the antecedent; secondary clauses may be depending from a *status constructus*; masculine singular relative pronoun (*za-*) may be used in agreement with plural and singular feminine nouns; on the history of the Ethiopic relative pronoun in particular, cf. OLGA KAPELIUK, “Some Remarks on the Etymology and Function of the Relative Markers in Ancient Ethiopic”, in M. LIONEL BENDER, GÁBOR TAKÁCS, DAVID L. APPELYARD (eds.), *Selected Comparative-Historical Afroasiatic Linguistic Studies in Memory of Igor M. Diakonoff* (LINCOS Studies in Afroasiatic Linguistics 14, München: Lincom Europa, 2003), pp. 219–32; cf. also ALESSANDRO BAUSI, “La frase relativa nelle lingue semitiche d’Etiopia”, *Quaderni del Dipartimento di Linguistica. Università degli studi di Firenze*, 1 (1990), pp. 105–23.

¹⁶ Cf. *DAE* p. 80, with reference to J. OSCAR BOYD, *The text of the Ethiopic version of the Octateuch, with special reference to the age and value of the Haverford manuscript* (Bibliotheca Abessinica 2, Leyden: E.J. Brill – Princeton, N.J.: The University Library, 1905); cf. also AUGUSTUS DILLMANN, *Biblia Veteris Testamenti Aethiopica. Veteris Testamenti Aethiopici Tomus Primus, sive Octateuchus Aethiopicus* (Lipsiae: Typis Guil. Vogelii, Filii, 1853), p. 5; AUGUST DILLMANN, *Ethiopic Grammar. Second edition enlarged and improved (1899) by Carl Bezold. Translated by James A. Crichton* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1907), pp. 87 f., § 46, where it is stressed that “in the oldest manuscripts and printed works” the lengthening “was only in rare cases consistently observed”; OSCAR LÖFGREN, *Die äthiopische Übersetzung des Propheten Daniel* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927), p. XXIII; ROCHUS ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum: The synoptic gospels. General introduction. Edition of the Gospel of Mark* (Äthiopistische Forschungen 27, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1989), II part, p. 26, with detailed reference to a number of ancient *Gospels* MSS (with almost unique or extremely rare exceptions, all the most ancient Ethiopic MSS are biblical) dating back up to the 14th cent. and beyond; cf. *ibid.*, p. 54, the interesting phenomenon in MS EMMML 6907, *Gospels* from the church of Madhānē ʿĀlam, Lālibalā, where lengthening is missing, but there is also vowel *a* after laryngeal: $aL|| > aLa||$, e.g., *baḥr* (not *bāḥr*) $>$ *baḥar*, *baḥtu* (not *bāḥtu*) $>$ *baḥatu*, *baḥtit* (not *bāḥtit*) $>$ *baḥatit*, *ya^cqob* (not *yā^cqob*) $>$ *ya^caqob*.

¹⁷ The assumed case of $lz^b n$ (*DAE* no. 7, l. 22, and p. 80), with presumed loss of laryngeal, instead of $*lz^b n$, is not to be posed any more, since SCHNEIDER, “Notes sur les inscriptions royales”, cc. 602 f., has clearly shown that ʾbn is the substantive “stone”; cf., however, SIEGBERT UHLIG, “Eine trilinguale ʿEzana-Inschrift”, *Aethiopica*, 4 (2001), pp. 7–31, esp. p. 15, n. 14, “Fehlschreibung statt $lz^b n$ ”. A further minor point concerns third-laryngeal verbs, the derived stems of which usually preserve vowel *a* in

the question of laryngeals in Ethiopic is a very much debated one. It may suffice to say here that between ʿĒzānā’s Aksum inscriptions of the 4th cent. (*DAE* nos. 9–11 [= *RIÉ* nos. 187–189]) and the Marib inscription of the 6th cent. (*RIÉ* no. 195), not to speak of later ones (*DAE* 12, 13 and 14 [= *RIÉ* 193 and 194], and *RIÉ* 195), progressive development of the laryngeal rules has been generally assumed¹⁸.

One of the most important peculiarities of epigraphical Ethiopic noticed by Littmann is found in the causative stem of the verb: in face of regular *ā*-forms in the personal prefixes of the imperfect (*DAE* no. 11 [= *RIÉ* no. 189], l. 18, *yāgabbe*², l. 20, *yāmāssenu*, and ll. 20–21, *yāšaddefewo*), there is one instance of *a*-form in the personal prefix of the subjunctive, instead of *ā* as in standard Ethiopic (*DAE* no. 11, l. 46, *yāšne*^c, and p. 81). Littmann supposed – following a proposal by F. Praetorius on the *ä*-vocalization of the Tigrinya causative stem – that the language of the Ethiopic inscriptions reflected a transitional, probably dialectal, system, where the imperfect of the causative stem had been influenced by the vocalization of the perfect (*ʿaqtala*) in the imperfect (*yāqattel*), but not yet in the subjunctive (*yaqtel*). The transitional phase still characterized by simple *a*-vowel in the causative stem would fit in well with Praetorius’ hypothesis that the real mark of the causative stem was vowel *a*, and not an ²*a*-prefix¹⁹.

the second radical (cf. *DAE* p. 80), a peculiarity with many parallels in ancient MSS. The case of the alternation between *waʿeda* (*DAE* no. 11 [= *RIÉ* no. 189], l. 47, and p. 80) and *weʿeda* in the same inscription (*ibid.*, l. 27) may reflect, according to Littmann himself, free variations in the spoken language; on doublets as a result of diachronical divergences in the application of the laryngeal rules, cf. RAINER M. VOIGT, “The vowel system of Gəʿz”, in STANISLAV SEGERT and ANDRÁS J.E. BODROGLIGETI (eds.), *Ethiopian Studies Dedicated to Wolf Leslau on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday November 14th, 1981* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), pp. 355–62, esp. p. 360 ff.

¹⁸ Cf. WERNER DIEM, “Laryngalgesetze und Vokalismus. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Altäthiopischen”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 138/2 (1988), pp. 236–62, which is the only detailed study on the epigraphical Ethiopic evidence in a diachronical perspective; more in general, cf. at least MARCEL COHEN, “Consonnes laryngales et voyelles en éthiopiens. Conjugaison des verbes à laryngale médiane et finale”, *Journal Asiatique*, 210 (1927), pp. 19–57; ENNO LITTMANN, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 32 (1929), pp. 571–75, esp. pp. 571–73; ULLENDORFF, *The Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, pp. 161 ff.; VOIGT, “The vowel system of Gəʿz”; CHRISTOPH CORRELL, “Noch einmal zur Rekonstruktion des altäthiopischen Vokalsystems”, *Linguistische Berichte*, 93 (1984), pp. 51–65; MONICA DEVENS, “On the laryngeal rules in Geʿez”, in KAYE (ed.), *Semitic Studies*, pp. 289–94.

¹⁹ Cf. FRANZ PRAETORIUS, “Beiträge zur äthiopischen Grammatik und Etymologie”, *Beiträge zur Assyriologie*, 1 (1890), pp. 21–47 and 367–78, esp. pp. 26–28 (§ 13. *yefašsem und yefēšsem*), and p. 41 (§ 41. *Die Imperfektpräformative mit a*), already quoted

Another peculiarity mentioned by Littmann is the occasional occurrence of fifth order \bar{e} -ending in particles such as *mesla* (preposition), “with”, and *soba* (conjunction), “when”, which appear as *meslē* and *sobē* (normal forms before pronouns: suffixed $-h\bar{a}$ in the conjunction *soba* gives the adverb *so-bēhā*, “then”) also without suffix pronouns (*meslē* in *DAE* no. 10 [= *RIÉ* no. 188], ll. 16 and 23, and no. 9 [= no. 187]; and *sobē* in *DAE* no. 10, l. 7, and no. 11 [= *RIÉ* no. 189], ll. 7, 9 and 13²⁰): another case for which Littmann quotes parallels in MSS²¹.

The comparison between epigraphical Ethiopic and the most ancient MSS, the two main sources for the knowledge of the early phase of Ancient Ethiopic, may probably go a bit farther on than Littmann was able to do in his times. Although a great amount of ancient MSS have become accessible for study in the last decades, there still are several inconveniences: the chronological gap between the two evidences remains deep, and the most ancient Ethiopic MSS do not date back beyond the 13th century (I am not considering here the later royal Aksumite inscriptions, *DAE* nos. 12, 13 and 14 = *RIÉ* 193 and 194, which pose too many problems of their own). We can not exclude that recent or less recent MSS, which have been copied from ancient exemplars may retain ancient forms, but the deficiency itself in very ancient MSS²² prevents us

in DILLMANN, *Ethiopic Grammar*, p. 188, n. 3, § 96; and later, FRANZ PRAETORIUS, “Zur Kausativbildung im Semitischen”, *Zeitschrift für Semitistik*, 5 (1927), pp. 39–42, with no reference to the Ethiopic inscriptions; and also COHEN, “Consonnes laryngales et voyelles en éthiopien”, pp. 29 f., with reference to the inscriptions.

²⁰ Cf. *DAE* p. 81; note that *meslē* in *DAE* no. 9, l. 33 is read *mesla* in *RIÉ* no. 187; *mesla* is found in *DAE* no. 9, ll. 6 and 12, while there is no epigraphical occurrence of *soba*.

²¹ Cf. AUGUST DILLMANN, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae* (Lipsiae: T.O. Weigel, 1865), cc. 174 and 354; and CARLO CONTI ROSSINI, “L’Evangelo d’oro di Dabra Libānos”, *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, s. 5, 10 (1901), pp. 177–219, esp. p. 181, who quotes “notevoli forme arcaiche”, such as *wasobē*, *emhābē*, *amē*, *eskē*; cf. also DILLMANN, *Biblia Veteris Testamenti*, p. 5, *heyyatē*, *eskē*, *emennē*; L. HACKSPILL, “Die äthiopische Evangelienübersetzung (Math. I–X)”, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete*, 11 (1896), pp. 117–96 and 367–88, esp. p. 128, *sobē*, *eskē*, *eskē sobē*, *eskē amē*, *habē*; BOYD, *The text of the Ethiopic version*, p. 16; CARL BEZOLD, *Kebra Nagast. Die Herrlichkeit der Könige*, 2 vols. (Abhandlungen der Kaiserlichen Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften I. Klasse XXIII. Band. I. Abteilung, München: Verlag der K. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1905), p. XVII; DILLMANN, *Ethiopic Grammar*, pp. 395, 405, 408–10, §§ 165–167, 170; ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, II part, pp. 26, 55, 57, 61, 68, 71 f. and 303 ff.

²² Cf. ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, part I, p. 37, “What happened between the time of translation and the period of the earliest extant MSS (10th/13th century) nobody knows”; within Christian Orient, the Ethiopic area is well far from the score, e.g., of the Syriac one, with its 300 MSS dated to 400–640 A.D., all the more impressive, considered that for the same period we have no more than 100 Greek MSS, cf. MARLIA

from knowing much of the early Ethiopic textual tradition. The fact that the oldest Ethiopic MSS are almost exclusively *Gospels* is an additional drawback: detailed studies of these MSS and of the subsequent textual tradition of the *Gospels* clearly show that text and forms were continuously updated during time (what may well be understood in the case of the biblical text). Anyway, it is exactly in the few very ancient MSS of the *Gospels*, such as the Abbā Garimā MSS (dated to the final Aksumite period, to the 10th/13th, or even to the 14th cent., according to the scholars)²³, and in more recent *Old Testament* MSS, dating back up to the 13th/14th cent., that the most interesting linguistic features are found. In this perspective, the evidence of very ancient non-biblical MSS (which may have been much less updated during the tradition) might be crucial, but till present day, they are extremely rare, if not totally missing. In the overwhelming majority of the textual tradition known to us, since the 14th cent. onwards, formal linguistic updating has already taken place and there are no significant variations any more.

Manuscript documentation of some epigraphical peculiarities, which had already been noticed²⁴, can now be largely confirmed and implemented with other

MUNDELL MANGO, “The Production of Syriac Manuscripts, 400–700 AD”, in GUGLIELMO CAVALLO, GIUSEPPE DE GREGORIO, MARILENA MANIACI (a c.), *Scritture, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio. Atti del Seminario di Erice (18–25 settembre 1988)* (Biblioteca del «Centro per il collegamento degli studi medievali e umanistici in Umbria» 5, Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 1991), pp. 161–79, esp. p. 162.

²³ The most ancient Ethiopic *Gospels* MSS (Abbā Garimā MSS included), have been thoroughly studied by ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, II part, esp. pp. 44 ff.; ID., *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum. The Gospel of St. Matthew* (Aethiopistische Forschungen 55, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001); ID., “The Textual Background of the Gospel of Matthew in Ge’ez”, *Aethiopica*, 4 (2001), pp. 32–41; for recent additional bibliography cf. ALESSANDRO BAUSI, “Some short remarks on the Canon tables in Ethiopic manuscripts”, *Studi Magrebini*, 26 (1998–2002 [2004]) = CARMELA BAFFIONI (a c.), *Scritti in onore di Clelia Sarnelli Cerqua* (Centro di Studi Magrebini, Napoli: Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, 2004), pp. 45–67, esp. pp. 46 ff.

²⁴ As for confusion of sibilants and laryngeals, and that between first and fourth order in laryngeals, I will not spend many words here: although it has been observed a less chaotic situation in ancient MSS, the exchange has absolutely taken place in the writing too – e.g., in the most ancient Ethiopic MSS, general replacement of first-order laryngeals with fourth-order laryngeals, cf. ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, p. 46 –, although we do not have statistics allowing a precise evaluation of the phenomenon; in this respect, it really makes no sense, unless for texts of very ancient tradition – to devote pages to the presentation of this phenomenon in the introduction of critical editions, cf. PAOLO MARRASSINI, “L’edizione critica dei testi etiopici. Problemi di metodo e reperti linguistici”, in GIANCARLO BOLOGNESI – VITTORE PISANI (a c.), *Linguistica e filologia. Atti del VII Convegno Internazionale di Linguisti (Milano 12–14 settembre 1984)* (Sodalizio Glottologico Milanese 18, Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1987), pp. 347–56, esp. p. 349.

instances: this is valid for the assimilation of nasals *m* and *n* to a following consonant, both in the prepositions ^o*em-* followed by *b-*, but also *p-*²⁵, and in the preposition *heyya(t)ta* for *heyyanta*²⁶, “instead of”; for the occasional occurrence of fifth order *ē*-ending in particles, and for the missing lengthening of *a* to *ā* before laryngeals. Of course, also alternations of the type *uw/ew* (*iy/ey*), already noticed by Littmann in the inscriptions, are very commonly recorded in MSS²⁷. What can now be added is that the probably oldest Ethiopic MS, Abbā Garimā I, uses consistently initial ^o*e-* instead of ^o*i-* before semivowel *γ-*, a phenomenon which is paralleled by an epigraphic occurrence (*DAE* no. 9 [= *RIĒ* no. 187], l. 4, *za^oeyetmawwā*), and which need not be explained by the hypothesis that the variations in the MS “may have been introduced by non-Semitic language speakers”, as it has been suggested²⁸.

²⁵ Cf. BEZOLD, *Kebra Nagast*, p. xvii, ^o*e(b)-bēta* instead of ^o*em-bēta*, ^o*e(b)-beḥēru* instead of ^o*em-beḥēru*; DILLMANN, *Ethiopic Grammar*, p. 104, n. 1, § 55; cf. also ALESSANDRO BAUSI, *Il Sēnodos etiopico. Canonii pseudoapostolici. Canonii dopo l’Ascensione, Canonii di Simone Cananeo, Canonii apostolici, Lettera di Pietro*, 2 vols. (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 552–553, Scriptores Aethiopici 101–102, Lovanii: In aedibus Peeters, 1995), text vol., pp. xl f., esp. in ^o*e(b)bēta*; ^o*e(p)-Plāton* instead of ^o*em-Plāton*, a rare instance of assimilated *p*, is found in the Ethiopic version of the *Acta Phileae*, a probably Aksumite translation from a Greek “Vorlage”, cf. ID., *La versione etiopica degli Acta Phileae nel Gadla samā’tāt* (Supplemento n. 92 agli Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli, Napoli: IUO, 2002), p. 26, n. 91.

²⁶ Cf. DILLMANN, *Biblia Veteris Testamenti*, p. 5; BOYD, *The text of the Ethiopic version*, p. 16; DILLMANN, *Grammar*, p. 108, tended to interpret the other way round *heyyanta* as a variation of *heyyata*, with insertion of nasal (cf. *ibid.*, p. 402, § 166: “*heyyanta* ‘instead of’, originally *heyyata*”); but this is well far from having been ascertained, cf. WOLF LESLAU, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge’ez (Classical Ethiopic)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1987), p. 221, s.v. *heyyanta*, and p. 222, s.v. *heyyata*; anyway, it is difficult to agree with KÖNIG’s view, *Neue Studien*, p. 98, that even forms such as *me(t)ta* instead of *menta*, *ba^oenta* instead of *ba^oe(t)ta*, and *emu(t)tu*, instead of *emuntu*, all the more when witnessed by an Aksumite text such as the *Pastor Hermae*, cf. *ibid.*, “sind wohl, wie es bei den letzten am klarsten ist, als Versehen des Schreibers zu betrachten” (cf. below).

²⁷ Cf. *DAE* p. 80; for MSS, cf. DILLMANN, *Biblia Veteris Testamenti*, p. 5 (*tuled/tewled*, but also *tawled*); DILLMANN, *Ethiopic Grammar*, pp. 97–99, § 52; BEZOLD, *Kebra Nagast*, p. xvi; ADOLF GROHMANN, *Aethiopische Marienhymnen* (Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philologisch-historische Klasse 33/4, Leipzig: Teubner, 1919), p. 42; LÖFGREN, *Die äthiopische Übersetzung*, p. xxiii; BERND MANUEL WEISCHER, *Qērellos I. Der Prosphonetikos ‘Über den rechten Glauben’ des Kyrillos von Alexandrien an Theodosios II* (Afrikanistische Forschungen 7, Qērellos 1, Glückstadt: Verlag J.J. Augustin, 1973), p. 16; ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, II part, pp. 55 and 307.

²⁸ Cf. ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, II part, pp. 45 f.; the explanation has been advanced by GETATCHEW HAILE, *ibid.*, p. 46, n. 8; similar statement concerning the chaotic alternation of *a* and *ā* vowels (a phenomenon neither of paleo-

Preservation of *e*-vowel in the personal prefixes of first-laryngeal verbs (*ye-*, *te-*, *ne-*, instead of *ya-* etc.) is commonly considered an archaism, and it has been noticed several times in MSS; however the only relevant epigraphical occurrence of personal prefix before a laryngeal-verb form (*DAE* no. 9 [= *RIÉ* no. 187], ll. 13–14, *ya^calu*, subjunctive of *wa^cala*) shows that the *e*-vowel is not preserved²⁹. The ‘progressive’ character of the language of the inscriptions under this respect, could hint that there existed at least different spellings, even if not phonetically relevant³⁰ –, and that ancient MSS may preserve traditions which tend to disappear completely in later periods, and have found no place in ‘standard’ Ethiopic.

As to phenomena peculiar to ancient MSS, some attention may deserve the spelling *zeyāqon* (or *zyāqon*) instead of *diyāqon*³¹: in this case, the evidence of *zā*-forms in modern Ethio-Semitic languages seems to demon-

graphic nature nor dependent upon laryngeal-conditioned phonetic contexts, cf. BAUSI, *Il Sēnodos etiopico*, text vol., pp. XL f.) has been done by TEDROS ABRAHA, review in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 70/2 (2004), pp. 471–77, esp. p. 470 f., who thinks that the language of the text under review (GETATCHEW HAILE, *Daqiqa Estifānos “Babegg² Amlāk” (Terg^wem)*, Collegeville, 2004 [*non vidi*]) may have been written or at least copied (*sic*) by people who did not speak Tigrinya and Amharic (“La lingua in cui ‘la Vita dei Padri e dei Fratelli’ è stata scritta o almeno ricopiata, lascia trasparire la partecipazione attiva di pesonaggi la cui lingua madre non era l’amarico o il tigrino”); I think it is difficult to agree with Tedros, who bases on this evidence the hypothesis that Ethiopic (language and related literary culture too) did not exclusively belong to Tigrinya and Amharic speaking people: if the errors are imputed to non-Semitic speakers, this same evidence would confirm a dramatic gap in learning between Semitic and non-Semitic speakers in mastering Ethiopic; on the other hand, I wonder whether a non-Semitic speaker, after learning a literary language such as Ethiopic (although Semitic, yet an exotic language for Tigrinya and Amharic speakers too) through a years-long training (in which language? probably a Semitic one, as Amharic has been the Ethiopian teaching language for centuries), might get into trivial errors as a consequence of his mother-tongue.

²⁹ Cf. *DAE* p. 27, without any comment *ad locum*; as for the phenomenon in MSS, cf. DILLMANN, *Biblia Veteris Testamenti*, p. 5; ID., *Ethiopic Grammar*, pp. 85 f., § 44; LÖFGREN, *Die äthiopische Übersetzung*, p. XXIII; WEISCHER, *Qērellos I*, p. 16; ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopice*, II part, p. 27, with large references to *Gospels MSS*.

³⁰ As clearly remarked by DILLMANN, *ibid.*, pp. 85 f., § 44, “In the older manuscripts and the impressions which follow them, forms like *mehar*, *yeḥawweru*, *ye²ammen* & c. are still very common, while it is always possible that even in earlier times an *a*-sound was given in speech, although not in writing”.

³¹ Cf. DILLMANN, *Lexicon*, c. 1063, “*zeyāq^wana* (pro *deyāq^wana*)”; LESLAU, *Comparative Dictionary*, p. 647, *zeyāq^wana*, “‘become a deacon’ (denominative); the form is strange”, and p. 642 *zēq^wana*, ‘become a deacon’ and causative *azēq^wana*; for occurrences in Ethiopic texts, cf. BAUSI, *Il Sēnodos etiopico*, pp. XL f.

strate that the *zeyāqon*-forms prelude to historical phonetic developments, which however have emerged in written representation only in a relatively ancient period³². An alternative explanation may suppose the existence of ancient separate traditions, originating in the period itself of the first translations from the Greek in the Aksumite period³³. In both cases, it must be noted that the later writing tradition has standardised the *diyā-* forms.

An additional remark has to be done on the occurrence of *ē*-ending particles. Littmann hypothetically suggested that epigraphical *ʾellē*-form occurrences in the name of king *ʾellē ʿamidā* (*DAE* no. 10 [= *RIÉ* no. 188], l. 1, and no. 11 [= no. 189], ll. 2 and 4³⁴) could betray the same phenomenon, but did not include *ʾellē*-forms in his discussion of *ē*-forms³⁵. Littmann may have been induced to keep separate *ʾellē*-forms from other *ē*-forms by considering two elements: neither any occurrence of *ē*-ending forms has been recorded in MSS, nor, on the other side, the plural relative pronoun does ever occur as *ʾellē* in the inscriptions, but always as *ʾella*; therefore, *ʾellē*-forms seems to be confined to personal names, and this has also opened the way to the hypothesis that the onomastic element *ʾellē* may be a substantive. However – we can say now – *ʾellē*-forms of the plural relative pronoun, although very rare, have

³² Cf. LESLAU, *Comparative Dictionary*, p. 642, with references to Tigrinya *zaqʷänä* and Amharic *zaqqʷänä*, “variant of *diyāqon* (with alternance *d:z*)”; also the form *diyāqon* is widespread in modern Ethio-Semitic languages, cf. *ibid.*, p. 146.

³³ In this case, *zeyāqon* or *zyāqon* and the resulting forms in the modern languages may be due to a Greek form and/or pronunciation where $\delta\iota-$ > $\xi-$, what is well witnessed in the Greek of the papyri, cf. FRANCIS THOMAS GIGNAC, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods. Volume I. Phonology* (Testi e documenti per lo studio dell’antichità 55, Milano: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1976), p. 75.

³⁴ Note that *DAE* no. 10, l. 1, reads *ʾallē*, cf. p. 28, and no. 11, l. 2 reads “*ʾallē* oder *ʾellē*”, cf. p. 32; *ʾallē* is the only form in LITTMANN, “Äthiopische Inschriften”, pp. 110 and 115; however, the readings *ʾellē* may be considered absolutely certain, cf. *RIÉ* vol. I, p. 265.

³⁵ Cf. *DAE* p. 30, where the hypothesis is advanced, and p. 82, where *ʾallē* is tentatively considered an erroneous writing for the correct *ʾella*. I have already discussed in detail the recent interpretation of the onomastic element *ʾellē* as a substantive – “Etiopico *ʾellē*: a proposito di un’ipotesi recente”, *Scrinium* 1 (2005) = SERGEI FRANTSOUZOFF, LEONID KOGAN, BASIL LOURIE, DENIS NOSNITSIN (eds.), *Varia Aethiopica. In Memoriam of Sevir Chernetsov (1943–2005)* (Sankt Petersburg, 2005), pp. 3–11 –, advanced by GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI, “Note linguistiche per la storia dell’Etiopia antica”, in VERENA BÖLL, DENIS NOSNITSIN, THOMAS RAVE, WOLBERT SMIDT, EVGENIA SOKOLINSKAIA (eds.), *Studia Aethiopica In Honour of Siegbert Uhlig on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), pp. 67–77, esp. pp. 70 ff., and ID., review of ALESSANDRO BAUSI, *La «Vita» e i «Miracoli» di Libānos*, 2 vols. (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 595–96, Scriptores Aethiopici 105–6, Lovanii: In aedibus Peeters, 2003), in *Aethiopica*, 7 (2004), pp. 245–50, esp. pp. 248 ff.

been noticed in MSS too³⁶. Their existence seem to strengthen the possible understanding of the ^o*ellē*-forms as variations of ^o*ella*-forms, exactly as it happens for other particles. This could also hint at the existence of distinct dialectal variants in epigraphical Ethiopic, with ^o*ella*-forms prevailing in the ‘standard’ language of the inscriptions and, respectively, ^o*ellē*-forms in the royal names alone. The distribution of the *ē*-forms may strengthen this hypothesis: there is no example of *ē*-forms in the inscription of Marib (*RIÉ* no. 195), dating to the first half of the 6th cent. (so in *RIÉ* no. 264 from Zafār, l. 3, *ḥaba*), while there are examples of alternations in the certainly later inscription of Ham (*RIÉ* no. 232, ^o*amē* in ll. 2 and 3, but ^o*ama* in l. 11)³⁷, dating exactly or approximately to the 9th cent.

Among the epigraphical peculiarities, as I have already remarked, particular attention must be devoted to the forms of the causative stem: we have examples of ‘classic’ *ā*-prefix forms in the imperfect (*yāqattel*), probably analogically influenced by the vocalization of the perfect (^o*aqtala*), and one example of ‘archaic’ *a*-prefix form in the subjunctive (*DAE* no. 11 [= *RIÉ* no. 189], l. 46, *yašne*). Recently emerged manuscript evidence of *a*-prefixes in the subjunctive of the causative stem, may support the hypothesis that the epigraphical *a*-form is neither due to an error of the scribe nor to a purely graphic alternation³⁸. The circumstance that the imperfect *ā*-prefix is found in open syllable, while the subjunctive *a*-prefix is found in closed syllable, could well explain the different treatment: *ā*-prefixes were first introduced into open syllable, and only later on into closed syllable. This could also explain the great

³⁶ MS EMMML 6942, *Gospels* from the church of Bēta ^oAmānu^oēl, Lālibalā, cf. ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, II part, pp. 71 ff., who interpreted them as due to a pseudo-archaising intention; other examples may be found both in MS EMMML 2796, and in a not yet catalogued MS, cf. ALESSANDRO BAUSI, “The Aksumite background of the Ethiopic ‘Corpus canonum’”, in SIEGBERT UHLIG (ed.), *Proceedings of the XVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Hamburg, 21.–25.7.2003* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, under press); cf. also ID., “Etiopico ^oellē”.

³⁷ Cf. GIANFRANCO FIACCADORI, “Epigraphica Aethiopica”, *Quaderni Utinensi*, 8 (15/16) (1990 [1996]), pp. 325–34, esp. pp. 325–37 (§ I. *Sull’iscrizione di Ham*), with full bibliography on pp. 329–31; MANFRED KROPP, “»Glücklich, wer vom Weib geboren, dessen Tage doch kurz bemessen, ...!«. Die altäthiopische Grabinschrift von Ham, datiert auf den 23. Dezember 873 n. Chr.”, *Oriens Christianus*, 83 (1999), pp. 162–75; OLGA KAPELIUK, “Reflections on the Ethio-Semitic Gerund”, in FUKUI, KURIMOTO, SHIGETA (eds.), *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective*, vol. I, pp. 492–98.

³⁸ As maintained by DIEM, “Laryngealgesetze und Vokalismus”, pp. 251 and 259–61; the evidence of *a*-prefix forms in the subjunctive of the causative stem is found in the not yet catalogued MS quoted above: of course, this hypothesis must be very cautiously advanced, as the *a*-forms could also be explained as a sporadic occurrence of the aforementioned alternation of *a* and *ā* vowels.

number of *a*-prefixes in the causative-of-the-reflexive *ast*-stem (*nasta-*, *yasta-*), which again have been noticed in recently emerged manuscript evidence³⁹. In this case, the absence of *ast*-stem forms in the inscriptions prevents us from any comparison with epigraphical Ethiopic.

A metathesis of root consonants is widely documented in the most ancient MSS, and in some of them is very frequent: it affects the first and second radical consonants of the verb *ʾabaza* in the prefix conjugation forms: as a result, we have an imperfect *yeḥeʾez* instead of *yeʾehez*, and a subjunctive *yaḥaʾaz* instead of *yaʾabaz*⁴⁰. The epigraphical texts do not offer evidence for any comparison.

The same aforementioned recently emerged manuscript evidence frequently exhibits an astonishing linguistic feature: the imperfect of the passive *t*-stem does not follow the Ethiopic pattern (*yetqattal*), but a slightly different one, which I would tentatively vocalize *yetqettal* (and *ye(q)qettal*, with assimilation of *t* before first-radical sibilants or dentals). Number and consistency of the instances prevent any interpretation of the forms either as occasional errors or as due to paleographic confusions. It is also clear that no interpretation can be advanced without considering the corresponding Tigrinya pattern of the *t*-stem imperfect *yeqettäl* (indeed, at least from a synchronic point of view, an internal passive⁴¹), which is identical (with *e*-vowel in the first radical), except for the absence of the *t*-prefix.

This case implies a short philological reflexion. My impression is that a number of interesting forms (such as the *yetqettal* pattern) may have been interpreted by editors of Ethiopic texts as simple errors, or deviations from

³⁹ For the *ast*-stem cf. MICHAEL WALTISBERG, *Die St-Stämme des Altäthiopischen* (LINCOS-Studies in Afro-Asiatic Linguistics 8, München: Lincom Europa, 2001); ID., “Die Funktionen der altäthiopischen St-Stämme. Ein Kurzbericht”, in NORBERT NEBES (Hrsg.), *Neue Beiträge zur Semitistik. Erstes Arbeitstreffen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Semitistik in der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft vom 11. bis 13. September 2000 an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena* (Jenaer Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient 5, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), pp. 281–88; for the correct definition of the causative of the reflexive as *ast*-stem (not *st*-stem), cf. GIDEON GOLDBENBERG, *Aethiopica*, 7 (2004), pp. 253–62, esp. p. 254.

⁴⁰ Cf. ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, pp. 27, 46 (MS Abbā Garimā I), 54 (MS EMMML 6907) and 307; other examples in the not yet catalogued MS quoted above; the metathesis was neither noticed by DILLMANN, *Grammar*, nor by ID., *Lexicon*, c. 766 ff.; nothing also in LESLAU, *Comparative dictionary*, p. 14.

⁴¹ The hypothesis that the *yeqettäl* Tigrinya form is a real internal passive has been advanced by TEFAY TEWOLDE, in a lecture (“Correlation between nominal and verbal patterns in Tigrinya”), given at the Seminar of Semitic and Ethiopian Studies of the University of Florence, in collaboration with the Ph.D. course in African Studies of the University of Naples “L’Orientale”, in November 2004.

the current paleographic norm⁴², so that did not deserve enough attention and was not recorded. It is evident that, up to a certain point, there can be no reliable historical linguistics of Ancient Ethiopic without a valid and conscious philological approach⁴³. I will quote a simple example, which shows the necessary strict relation between philology (as text-criticism) and historical linguistics: the *varia lectio* of manuscript tradition: *yebē*, instead of correct: *diba*, almost certainly presupposes the common antecedent: *dibē* > (*diba* / *yebē*)⁴⁴. This case is of noteworthy linguistic relevance in itself, but may help to establish guidelines for hypotheses on the textual history of the texts: alternations *diba* / *yebē*⁴⁵ may imply a tradition going back to an age when *ē*-forms were at least much more frequent than it happens in later MSS.

Finally, some tentative conclusive remarks:

1) the language of the Aksumite inscriptions can not be univoquely defined as more archaic in comparison with the reconstructed proto-Ancient

⁴²It is even too obvious to say that the age of a text can not be determined on a paleographic basis: the age of a text, on the contrary, will always remain in principle, a philological and possibly linguistic question. In an eventual phase it will be possible to try to establish a correlation between paleographic (and tentatively, linguistic) characteristics (the “scribal tradition”), and the real age of the texts; only finally will scribal peculiarities be considered as clues to dating, but still as purely tendential elements (one can not exclude that even relatively recent texts may have been copied by pseudo-archaizing traditions).

⁴³Cf. MARRASSINI, “L’edizione critica dei testi etiopici”; ID., “Problems of Gəʿəz Philology”, in PETR ZEMÁNEK (ed.), *Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures. Memorial Volume of Karel Petráček* (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Oriental Institute, 1996), pp. 371–78; cf. also STEFAN BOMBECK, “hallo und kona im altäthiopischen Markusevangelium”, *Biblische Notizen*, 87 (1997), pp. 5–12; ALEXANDER SIMA, “konä yəqättäl in einer Wiener Handschrift des äthiopischen Danielbuches. Ein Beitrag zur Textgeschichte des altäthiopischen Daniel und zur Sprachgeschichte des Gəʿəz”, *Oriens Christianus*, 87 (2003), pp. 123–29; on some philological aspects of the important contribution by WENINGER, *Das Verbalsystem des Altäthiopischen*, cf. the review by BAUSI, *Annali dell’Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”*.

⁴⁴Cf. *yebē*, instead of correct *diba*, in two texts translated from the Greek in the Aksumite period: ANDRÉ CAQUOT, “Une version geʿez du Traité d’Hippolyte de Rome sur l’Antichrist”, *Annales d’Éthiopie*, 6 (1965), pp. 165–214, esp. p. 208, ad § 52, ll. 6–7; and ALESSANDRO BAUSI, “L’Epistola 70 di Cipriano di Cartagine in versione etiopica”, *Aethiopica*, 1 (1998), pp. 101–30, esp. p. 116, § 33, and p. 108.

⁴⁵Technically, the textual alternation (*dibē* >) *diba* / *yebē* can be termed “diffrazione”, according to GIANFRANCO CONTINI, *Breviario di ecdotica* (Milano – Napoli: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1986; repr. Einaudi Paperbacks. Letteratura 222, Torino: Einaudi, 1990 and 1992²), cf. index, p. 237; it corresponds to the *lectio media* of traditional terminology, cf. SEBASTIANO TIMPANARO, *La genesi del metodo del Lachmann. Con una Presentazione e una Postilla di Elio Montanari* (UTET Libreria, Torino: UTET, 2003⁴), p. 40, n. 34.

Ethiopic: the only epigraphical instance of personal prefix form in first-laryngeal verb has vowel *a*, but instead of *a*-prefixes, ancient MSS frequently exhibit *e*-prefixes; \bar{e} -forms appear with discontinuous frequency in the inscriptions: relatively frequent in the $\bar{E}z\bar{a}n\bar{a}$ inscriptions (4th cent.), totally absent in Kālēb's Marib inscription (6th cent.), they still appear again in the Post-Aksumite Ham inscription (probably, 9th cent.); there are also manuscript parallels to *a*-prefixes in the subjunctive of the causative stem; the only linguistic element with no parallel in the MSS is the variation of the personal independent pronouns in the inscription of Kālēb's son, W^cZB (*RIÉ* no. 192);

2) \bar{e} -forms are not constantly distributed according to the age of the MSS, and they are less frequent in the Abbā Garimā MSS than in other later MSS⁴⁶: this may point to the coexistence of parallel scribal traditions during Aksumite and early Post-Aksumite periods, with different linguistic standards, determined either by the prevalence of dialectal features as a consequence of the lack of a unique scribal standard, or by plurality of standards, or even by an intentional reaction to declining standards⁴⁷; in this perspective, persistence of \bar{e} -forms should be put into the frame of a dialectal, more than diachronical opposition, whatever their exact origin may be;

3) A. Dillmann's hypothesis of a possible connection between \bar{e} -forms and a *-ia* (< $\bar{i}a$) element of the *status constructus*⁴⁸, is normally not accepted

⁴⁶ Cf. ZUURMOND, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, II part, pp. 44 ff. The dialectal character of the *a* / \bar{e} alternation, in this phase of the research, and on the basis of the available data, is largely hypothetical; cf. the short and keen remarks by MARCEL COHEN, *apud* SYLVAIN GREBAUT, "Morphologie nominale éthiopienne; remarques sur quelques formes anciennes", *Comptes rendus du Groupe Linguistique d'Études Chamito-Sémitiques*, 1 (1931–34), p. 27, "Certains des faits signalés sont nettement archaïques; d'autres sont aberrants, d'autres sembleraient marquer des tendances plus récentes que le guèze classique: peut-être les documents anciens examinés ont-ils une teinte dialectale dont la tradition est perdue; peut-être aussi y a-t-il eu, postérieurement, dans le guèze classique, réaction archaïsante contre certains innovations"; and SYLVAIN GREBAUT, "Notes de grammaire éthiopienne", *Aethiopica*, 2 (1934), pp. 83–85, esp. pp. 83 f. (§ 10. *Formes archaïques de quelques mots usuels*).

⁴⁷ I wonder, e.g., whether the rendering of the labial occlusives *b*, *p*, *p*, *f*, in front of Greek π , β , ζ , may be explained *also* by the existence of different scribal traditions; on the problem, cf. some references in BAUSI, *La versione etiopica*, p. 26, n. 92; cf. also SYLVAIN GRÉBAUT, "Notes de grammaire éthiopienne", *Aethiopica*, 3 (1935), pp. 58–60 (§ 13. *A propos de la transcription de la lettre π*); on the glottalised *p* consider also the remarks by ANDRE MARTINET, "Remarques sur le consonantisme sémitique", *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique*, 49 (1953), pp. 67–78, esp. pp. 69 f.

⁴⁸ Cf. DILLMANN, *Ethiopic Grammar*, p. 408, § 167, and p. 325, § 144; cf. however RAINER VOIGT, "Über die 'unregelmäßige' Form *yəbe* im Altäthiopischen (II)", *Aethiopica*, 3 (2000), pp. 120–31, esp. p. 120, n. 1, who explains \bar{e} as a connecting vowel before suffixes, and derives it from a *status constructus* "*ai*"-ending; on the Ethiopic *status constructus*

any more; the explanation first advanced by L. Hackspill⁴⁹ of a possible derivation from *status pronominalis* *la°lē- (< *la°lay-), later extended by analogy, has been largely accepted⁵⁰; according to this hypothesis, however, one should also assume that after the phase of the analogical extension in the *status pronominalis*, ē-forms would have been extended to the *status absolutus* too⁵¹; I wonder, on the contrary, whether the attachment of the personal pronoun suffixes may have preserved older ē-endings, as it happens in the *i*-vowel between plural noun and possessive pronoun (an outcome of the ancient *ī-ending of the old flexion in the plural)⁵², and in the first person plural perfect

cf. now JOSEF TROPPEL, “Der altäthiopische Status constructus auf -a aus sprachvergleichender Sicht”, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 90 (2000), pp. 201–18.

⁴⁹ Cf. HACKSPILL, “Die äthiopische Evangelienübersetzung”, p. 128; the explanation was fixed later on by CARL BROCKELMANN, *Grundriß der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprache*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther & Reichard, 1908–13), vol. I, p. 497, § 252, b, ε, Anm. 1.

⁵⁰ Cf. ROBERT HETZRON, “Third person singular pronoun suffixes in Proto-Semitic”, *Orientalia Suecana*, 18 (1969), pp. 101–27, esp. p. 118; ID., *Ethiopian Semitic. Studies in classification* (Journal of Semitic Studies Monograph 2, Manchester: University Press, 1972), p. 130, WERNER DIEM, “Die Verba und Nomina tertiae infirmae im Semitischen”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 127/1 (1977), pp. 15–60, esp. pp. 49–53, § 5.6 (*Das Problem der Präposition „auf“*), ID., “Laryngealgesetze und Vokalismus”, p. 260, n. 89; CORRELL, “Noch einmal zur Rekonstruktion”, p. 58, has underlined (following DIEM, “Die Verba und Nomina”, pp. 49–53), the purely morphological character of the -a/-ē alternation, from which that between *soba/sobē* is depending; as for °ama°amē, he thinks that from the series ye°ezē, “now”, mā°zē “when?”, gizē “time”, °edmē “set time”, an ē-suffix may have been extracted to characterize temporal expressions.

⁵¹ As for °ellē, it can not be derived from *status pronominalis*, as °ella may not take the pronoun suffixes; however, the possibility that °ellē may be a more archaic form than °ella should be explored: Ethiopic °ellī°a-, “those of”, cf. LESLAU, *Comparative Dictionary*, p. 18, may be a clue to the existence of an old *i*-ending in °ella; the plural form of the Sabaean relative pronoun is °ly, cf. BEESTON, *A Descriptive Grammar*, p. 49; also Modern South Arabian languages have comparable forms, such as Mehri *le, li*, cf. T.M. JOHNSTONE, *Mehri Lexicon and English-Mehri Word List* (University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), p. 78; Soqotri *il*, but also *ili*, cf. WOLF LESLAU, *Lexique Soqotri (sudarabique moderne)* (Collection linguistique publiée par la Société de linguistique de Paris 41, Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1938), p. 60; cf. also EWALD WAGNER, *Syntax der Mehri-Sprache unter Berücksichtigung auch der anderen neusüdarabischen Sprachen* (Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Institut für Orientforschung. Veröffentlichung Nr. 13, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953), p. 117; as for *elli* in Arabic dialects, cf. BROCKELMANN, *Grundriß*, vol. I, pp. 324 f.; also *illi*, cf. T.M. JOHNSTONE, *Eastern Arabian Dialect Studies* (London Oriental Series 17, London: University Press, 1967), p. 128.

⁵² Cf. PAOLO MARRASSINI, “Problems of South-Semitic”, in BAYE YIMAM, RICHARD PANKHURST, DAVID CHAPPLE, YONAS ADMASSU, ALULA PANKHURST, BIRHANU

ending *-na* (< *-nā*), which appears again as *-nā-* before pronoun suffixes⁵³; the same disclaimer may apply to the hypothesis advanced by E. Ullendorff, who derives *ē* by way of an *ā* (first order) > *ē* (fifth order) lengthening before personal pronoun suffixes, still within a qualitative, not quantitative, vowel system⁵⁴;

4) particular scribal traditions may have at the same time not only preserved, but even reinforced archaic features (*e*-prefix in first-laryngeal verbs; *ē*-forms; *a*-prefixes in subjunctive of the causative, and in the prefix forms of the *ast*-stem), especially if these forms are also found in modern Ethio-Semitic languages (such as *a*-prefixes in the subjunctive of the causative stem in Tigrinya);

5) in this context, it is very difficult to distinguish what is due to preservation of ancient features, and what is due to interference with spoken languages⁵⁵: anyway, morphological tigrinisms have been supposed in the inscription of Ham (*RIÉ* no. 232, l. 4, gerund *ḥarifu*, instead of expected Ethiopic **ḥarifo*⁵⁶), and in a monogram (*DAE* no. 98 = *RIÉ* no. 442, *ʿy* as the

TEFERRA (eds.), *Ethiopian Studies at the End of the Second Millennium. Proceedings of the XIVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies. November 6–11, 2000, Addis Ababa*, 3 vols. (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies – Addis Ababa University, 2002), vol. III, pp. 1786–97, esp. pp. 1791 f.

⁵³ Cf. PAOLO MARRASSINI, “Sur le sud-sémitique: problèmes de définition”, in JEROME LENTIN et ANTOINE LONNET (éds.), *Mélanges David Cohen* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2003), pp. 461–70, esp. pp. 466 and 468 f.

⁵⁴ Cf. ULLENDORFF, *The Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, p. 162; *contra*, cf. WOLF LESLAU, “Observations on a Comparative Phonology of Semitic Ethiopic”, *Annales d’Éthiopie*, 2 (1957), pp. 147–66, esp. p. 159; HETZRON, *Ethiopian Semitic*, p. 130.

⁵⁵ Cf. the remarks by RAINER VOIGT, in his review-article of ROBERT HETZRON (ed.), *The Semitic Languages* (Routledge language family descriptions, London: Routledge, 1997), in *Aethiopica*, 2 (1999), pp. 206–30, esp. p. 217 f., where he maintains that “Das Altäthiopische ist nicht ausgestorben”, and that it was replaced by Tigrinya and Tigre (the “direkten Nachfolgersprachen” of Ethiopic) along a centuries-long process, during which ancient and recent forms were used one by the other: an observation right in itself, but generally true for every internal linguistic development; as to the applicability of the Romance languages model to Ethio-Semitic languages, already proposed by ULLENDORFF, *Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, pp. 87 f., it has been criticized by STEFAN STRELBYN, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 22/1 (1957), pp. 161–64, esp. p. 163, in his review, but without convincing arguments (to the difference of Ethiopic, Latin was not “une langue importée” in Italy). This same factor has been invoked in explaining alternation of *a* and *ā* vowels in phonetic contexts not conditioned by laryngeals (cf. above), which still constitutes an open problem; it is also likely that in this case the peculiar role of the scribe as half-literate man in Ethiopian culture must be held in due consideration, cf. ALESSANDRO BAUSI, “Il testo, il supporto e la funzione. Alcune osservazioni sul caso dell’Etiopia”, in BÖLL *et al.* (eds.), *Studia Aethiopica*, pp. 7–22, esp. pp. 14 f.

⁵⁶ Cf. KAPELIUK, “Reflections on the Ethio-Semitic Gerund”, p. 494 f., who convincingly interpretes *ḥarifu* ‘*āmat* by “a year having elapsed”, as a Tigrinya pattern *lā2i3u* from an Ethiopic verbal root,

Tigrinya third person masculine pronoun ^ʿ*eyyu*⁵⁷); as for ancient MSS, we could tentatively consider tigrinisms: a) the metathesis of the first and second radical consonants of the verb ^ʿ*abaza* in the prefix conjugation forms (imperfect *yeḥeʿez* instead of *yeʿeḥez*, and subjunctive *yaḥaʿaz* instead of *yaʿabaz*), which seems to prelude to the *ḥazä* Tigrinya form (various explanations could be advanced for this passage); b) the spelling *zeyāqon* instead of *diyāqon*; c) the *t*-stem imperfect pattern *yet1e22a3*: this is to be compared with the corresponding *ye1e22ä3* Tigrinya pattern, and could be explained either as outcome of interference or as a compromise spelling-form⁵⁸;

6) from what we know of the Ethiopic manuscript tradition from the 14th cent. onwards, although we still lack a reliable statistical study, ancient features seem to become very sporadic (essentially limited to occasional *ē*-forms and *e*-prefix in first-laryngeal verbs): it is clear that one tradition imposed, or even reasserted, its own standard on the others; it is also possible that ancient MSS which did not observe the prevalent standard were systematically substituted at a certain period, probably at the same time when a great number of new texts were translated from the Arabic, and also revisions and/or replacements of ancient Aksumite translations from the Greek took place. As a consequence, a number of ancient texts, as well as a plurality of scribal and linguistic traditions, have gone definitively lost, and we can but hope to get some idea of them from by chance surviving relics.

Appendix. A short note on the philological background⁵⁹

Ethiopic literary tradition can be divided into several periods, but the essential commonly accepted distinction is that between two main periods: 1) the Aksumite period (4th–7th cent.), when the Ethiopic was a living language, with translations from the Greek and of no or very poor original production preserved; and 2) the Post-Aksumite period (since the 13th cent. at the latest), with translations from the Arabic and original texts (translations from

where the “ancient *a* in the suffix” has not been preserved, to the contrary of what happens in Ethiopic (*1a2i3o* < **1a2i3a-u*) and Amharic (*nägro* < **nägrä-u*).

⁵⁷ Cf. DREWES, “Some features”, p. 390.

⁵⁸ The relevance of this element can hardly be overestimated: this contradicts, e.g., the current statement that all the changes which “can be noticed between the early inscriptions and early Bible translations, on one hand, and the literary period of the late Middle Ages, on the other, are all almost exclusively in the sphere of phonetics”, cf. ULLENDORFF, *The Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, p. 14.

⁵⁹ For references on the topics, cf. BAUSI, “The Aksumite background”; ID., “Il testo, il supporto e la funzione”, esp. pp. 12–14 and 17 f.; cf. also BERND MANUEL WEISCHER, “Historical and Philological Problems of the Axumitic Literature (especially in the Qérellos)”, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 9/1 (1971), pp. 83–94 = *Abba Salama*, 6 (1975), pp. 163–73.

the Greek are not likely in Post-Aksumite age, and till now there is no evidence of texts originated in the obscure period from the 7th through the 13th cent.). What we know of the Aksumite literature (a number of Aksumite texts were replaced with new translations from the Arabic, re-used or revised) is witnessed to us by MSS which do not antedate the 13th cent. (when translations from the Arabic were already being done). Only in the case of the *Gospels* there are MSS older than the 13th cent., such as the three ʾAbbā Garimā MSS, although their exact date is very much debated (from the 6th/7th to the 14th cent.). Moreover, we do not practically know anything about the transmission of the written culture from the Aksumite Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages, apart from what we can guess by comparison and analogy with other civilizations.

This articulation in Aksumite and Post-Aksumite texts involves philological (text-critical and text-historical) consequences, which have not yet been considered in their entirety. I wonder, e.g., if there may have been any particular reason to which the loss, replacement, or revision (cf., e.g., the *Bible*) of the Aksumite texts may be imputed. Historical and institutional reasons, such as reinforcement of the relationships with the Patriarchate of Alexandria, have certainly played a decisive role. But it is also possible that the fading away of the textual tradition of some Aksumite texts might be due to linguistic reasons: some particularly literal Aksumite translations from the Greek may have become totally obscure and no more understandable, especially considering the conditions of the textual tradition from the 8th through the 12th cent., when written culture progressively declined. A number of ancient translations (abandoned and not copied any more), were heavily revised and re-adjusted in various ways, or gradually substituted by other independent translations from the Arabic. This text-traditional process marks a deep gap between two periods and two somehow different civilizations.

As for Aksumite texts, it is possible that during time different kinds of translations were experienced. A relationship can be probably established (of course, there is no need to suppose direct dependences) with what happened in Syriac, but also Armenian and Latin domains, where around the turning point of the 5th/6th up to the 7th cent., the translation style radically changed, and from extremely free (“expositional and tendential in character” and “reader-oriented”), became gradually more slavish, and then absolutely literal and formally equivalent (“source-oriented” and “mirror type”, in S. Brock’s terminology), no doubt also as a consequence of the christological controversies⁶⁰: this may be one of the reasons why we do not find syntactical features

⁶⁰ Cf. SEBASTIAN BROCK, “Towards a History of Syriac Translation Technique”, in *III° Symposium Syriacum. Les contacts du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures* (Orien-

in the early MSS texts which appear in the inscriptions, such as transpositions of the object before the verb, direct speech before the verb “to say”, and *za*-genitive before the antecedent, which have been interpreted as early examples of non-Semitic syntax⁶¹.

Although the text-traditional context may be rather unfavourable to discern literary, scribal, and also linguistic features, yet it seems possible, at least in some instances, to overcome the traditional gap between Aksumite and Post-Aksumite periods, and throw some light on less obvious textual documents dating back to Aksumite times. A good example is that of MS EMMML 1763, a precious 14th cent. MS⁶², which certainly marks a transitional moment from pure preservation of texts of ancient Aksumite heritage, such as the *Acts of Mark* and the *Acts of Peter* (emblematically, the ‘founder’ and ‘the last of the martyrs’ of the Patriarchate of Alexandria), and the constitution of a more recent *corpus*: in fact, at the same time it reliably witnesses both texts translated in the Aksumite period which belong in the most archaic phase of Ethiopian literary history, and original texts which were produced in a new literary phase, that keeps on using widely an ancient heritage, although probably not understood any more, or twisted to an extent which is very difficult to ascertain, unless other sources become available⁶³.

Summary

‘Ancient features’ of Ethiopic in Aksumite inscriptions and ancient MSS must be discussed with consideration of the philological aspects implied, and their distribution may hint at the coexistence of parallel scribal traditions during Aksumite and early Post-Aksumite periods; from the 14th cent. onwards ‘ancient features’ tend to become much more sporadic and one traditional standard prevails; ancient MSS which did not observe the prevalent standard may have been systematically substituted; ‘lost traditions’ may survive in few scanty relics.

talia Christiana Analecta 221, Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1983), pp. 1–14, esp. pp. 12 ff.; repr. in ID., *Studies in Syriac Christianity* (Variorum Collected Studies Series 357, Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain – Burlington, Vermont, USA: Ashgate Variorum, 1992), no. IX.

⁶¹ Cf. *DAE* p. 81; on these and other features, cf. the remarks by KAPELIUK, “Reflections on the Ethio-Semitic Gerund”, pp. 494 f.

⁶² For detailed references on the MS, cf. BAUSI, “The Aksumite background”.

⁶³ Under this respect, the aforementioned (cf. above) MS promises to give new very important data.