



# Aethiopica 08 (2005)

International Journal of Ethiopian and Eri-  
treat Studies

---

RONNY MEYER

**Dissertation abstract**

*Das Zay. Deskriptive Grammatik einer Ostguragesprache (Äthiosemitisch)*

Dissertation accepted by Fachbereich 12 – Sozialwissenschaften at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz in 2003, defended on December 19, 2003 to obtain a Dr. phil. degree

Aethiopica 08 (2005), 293–294

ISSN: 1430–1938

---

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

## Dissertation abstracts

RONNY MEYER, *Das Zay. Deskriptive Grammatik einer Ostguragesprache (Äthiosemitisch)*.<sup>1</sup> Dissertation accepted by Fachbereich 12 – Sozialwissenschaften at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz in 2003, defended on December 19, 2003 to obtain a Dr. phil. degree.

The dissertation provides evidence that the Zay language – a hitherto poorly described language with the exception of Leslau (1999) – possesses typical features of Ethiosemitic, in particular of Eastern Gurage. Several linguistic theories and models are used in order to analyze and present the language data on Zay gathered during extensive field stays in Zway. With regard to phonology and partly also to morphology generative and structural approaches dominate. However, for analyzing the usage of morphemes and syntactic structures functional and typological approaches and grammaticalization models are used.

The discussed linguistic data on Zay rise new questions in regard to the classification of Ethiosemitic languages. The main criteria for dividing these languages into a Transversal and an Outer South Ethiosemitic group (cf. Hetzron 1972) is the existence of so-called main verb markers, i.e. overt morphological markers for forming declarative sentences. These markers of illocutionary force are said to be the main criteria for classifying a language as a member of the Outer South Ethiosemitic group, while temporal auxiliaries fulfill the function of main verb markers in the transversal group. Zay - as a member of the transversal group - possesses both an overt morphological marker and temporal auxiliaries in declarative sentences. The co-occurrence of both main verb markers and temporal auxiliaries in Zay indicates that either this alleged classificational feature must be revised or the position of Zay within South Ethiosemitic has to be reconsidered.

The high degree of multilingualism among Zay mother tongue speakers with Amharic and Oromo is probably the main reason for several contact-induced language change phenomena. Such phenomena are the existence of phonemic short and long vowels of the same quality, the deletion of the short vowel *-ä* in word-final position, the usage of special syntactic construction to incorporate loan words from Oromo into the verbal system of Zay, a singulative marker, plenty of lexical borrowings, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Published in: *Grammatische Analyse afrikanischer Sprachen* Bd. 25, hrsg. von WILHELM J.G. MÖHLIG und BERND HEINE, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe 2005; s. forthcoming review in *Aethiopica* 9 (2006).

#### Dissertation abstracts

In addition, Zay possesses further grammatical features which have not yet been described for other Ethiosemitic languages. Of particular importance is the existence of the features [+round] and [+front] as non-segmental phonemes in Zay. Furthermore, the syntax of Zay is much more complex than of related Ethiosemitic languages. Zay exhibits a syntactical structure containing obligatory focus marking and an additional marking of declarative sentences. While in Gunnän-Gurage languages markers of illocutionary force are quite common, a syntactic structure involving obligatory focus marking is well-known from Cushitic languages. Both syntactic strategies are unified in Zay. Such a combination of focus and illocutionary forces morphemes in syntax is not known for any Cushitic or Ethiosemitic language.

JONATHAN MIRAN, '*Facing the Land, Facing the Sea: Commercial Transformation and Urban Dynamics in the Red Sea Port of Massawa, 1840s–1900s*', Dissertation at the Department of History, Michigan State University, East Lansing, defended on January 9, 2004 to obtain a Ph.D. of History.

This dissertation examines the making of a complex Red Sea urban coastal society in Massawa (in present day Eritrea) in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a centuries-old port town Massawa's traditional role and *raison d'être* has been to mediate between multiple commercial spheres connecting regions of the northeast African interior and beyond it with regions of the Middle East and South Asia. This study examines how a particular new conjuncture of political, economic, technological and migratory factors in the wider Red Sea and western Indian Ocean area in the middle decades of the century transformed Massawa. It re-organized the structure of its commercial relationships, which, as a result, shaped the particular social and cultural make-up of the port-town's inhabitants.

At the heart of the study is an examination of the town's leading families who traced their origins both to areas of the northeast African interior and to a variety of overseas locations and who operated in the port-town principally as merchants, brokers and entrepreneurs. This "aristocratic class", as one Italian colonial official qualified it, dominated the town's legal, commercial and religious institutions and developed a strong sense of local urban yet sophisticated worldly identity reflecting a distinct sense of *esprit de corps*. They particularly stressed their refined urban culture, a strong link to the wider community of Muslim believers (*umma*), and a sense of connectedness to Arab history and culture. I analyze the social, religious and material bases of their power (or different forms of capital) as well as the complex social and