



Aethiopica 08 (2005)

International Journal of Ethiopian and Eri-
treat Studies

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Dissertation abstract

'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

Aethiopica 08 (2005), 294–295

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

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

cultural mechanisms and strategies that enabled them to perform and protect their role as a flexible janus-faced community simultaneously facing land and sea but remaining distinct from both. I thus reveal the inner structure of a community of mediators, tracing the chains and networks of linkages that connected the town's hinterlands to its forelands.

The study refutes perceptions viewing Massawa as "alien" to its environment by historically contextualizing its specificity and deconstructing the development of its culturally outgoing dispositions, but at the same time locally rooted social realities in a period of great political, economic and social change. The study presents a more local/region-based historical perspective in an arena of northeastern African historiography that is still being vigorously debated by scholars almost entirely in nationalist discourses. It also links the Eritrean-Ethiopian region – traditionally perceived as somewhat isolated from its broader environment – with the wider world of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. The study is based on a wide variety of 19th-century European sources, Italian colonial archival materials, Arabic language sources, oral data collected in Eritrea, and a newly-discovered collection of legal records from Massawa's Islamic court.

JOACHIM CRASS, *Das K^oabeena – Deskriptive Grammatik einer hochlandostkuschitischen Sprache*. Dissertation accepted at the Fachbereich 14, Philologie II of the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, defended on December 22, 2004 to obtain a Dr. phil. degree of Philosophy.

K^oabeena is a Highland-East-Cushitic language spoken by some 35.000 speakers. The settling area of the people is located in and around the town of Wolkite, a town situated some 160 km south west of Addis Ababa on the main road to Jimma. The closest related languages are Alaaba, Kambaata and T'imbaaro. The presented data were collected during four field stays between December 2000 and March 2003. The data are described by using structural and functional approaches.

This language possesses several interesting features of which some are found scarcely in other languages of the world. On the level of phonology, a striking feature is the occurrence of five whispered vowels. These whispered vowels are allophones of the five voiced short vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. In two of the 13 flexion classes of nouns, the whispered vowels are the only feature distinguishing case. Another important phonological feature is stress accent. All word classes have an unmarked position of the accent: e.g. one group of