



Aethiopica 6 (2003)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

OLGA KAPELIUK

Review

GÄBRÄ IYYÄSUS KIFLE, ታሪክ ትውልዲ ልሳን ግእዝ *Tariḵ təwləddi ləssan Gəʿəz* [History of the origin of the Gəʿəz language – in Tigrinya]

Aethiopica 6 (2003), 263–265

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

Reviews

concerning the laryngeal and sibilant consonants, the author had to overcome also the problem of transcribing the vowel of the sixth order ə and the gemination. The latter seems to have constituted the major difficulty. The author writes (p. 47) that in the case of these two “wird versucht, grammatisch und etymologisch “richtig” zu transkribieren. Insgesamt ist die hier verwendete Umschrift also mehr Transliteration als Transkription”. While referring to the marking of gemination the inverted commas around *richtig* couldn't be more accurate. It definitely is not a transliteration² because the author indicates regularly the gemination in all the forms of the imperfect, though it hasn't much to do with etymology (except for the “intensive” stem) and had been “discovered” only thanks to the study of the traditional pronunciation of the Ethiopian priests. The truth is that correct transcription of Gəʿəz gemination is no mystery. The author would have avoided many strange forms, such as for instance *-kəmmu* for the suffix pronoun, as well as the ending of the perfect, in the 2nd person plural instead of *-kkəmu*, or *ʾantəmmu* for the more correct *ʾanttəmu*, if he had simply consulted more systematically W. Leslau's *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez* and above all Eugen Mittwoch's *Die Traditionelle Aussprache des Aethiopischen* (Berlin 1926) which isn't even mentioned in the bibliography.

But, despite these minor remarks, S. Weninger deserves our warmest congratulations and gratitude for having presented us with this erudite and comprehensive work.

Olga Kapeliuk

GÄBRÄ IYYÄSUS KIFLE, ታሪኽ ትውልዲ ልሳን ግእዝ *Tariḵ təwləddi ləssan Gəʿəz* [History of the origin of the Gəʿəz language – in Tigrinya]. Asmara: Asär Press, 2001 (1993 E.C.), 165 pages. Price: Naqfa 35.00.

The author of the book, Abba Gäbrä Iyyäsus Kifle – a monk and, for many years, a teacher in Ethiopian lay schools – studied Gəʿəz inside the traditional educational system from his earliest childhood and during some 20 years. Then he came to Jerusalem where he lived for several years, studying at the Hebrew University in the Departments of Biblical Studies and of Semitic Languages. His perfect mastery of Gəʿəz, Tigrinya and Amharic made him a sure source of information for countless queries from students and researchers in Ethiopian linguistics, including the author of these lines.

² Like for instance in E. BERNAND, A.J. DREWES and R. SCHNEIDER, *Recueil des Inscriptions de l'Ethiopie* (Paris 1991) where the gemination is consistently ignored.

Later he travelled to Europe where he was granted a Master's degree in theological studies. Among the reasons which led him to write the book under review the author mentions his feeling of frustration that Gə'əz and the history of its evolution should be studied and taught in foreign Universities but not in its own birthplace.

The author informs us that the composition of the book ended in the early 1970's during one of his stays in Ethiopia, but since at that time no books were printed in Tigrinya, he wrote it in Amharic. However, when a few years later he presented it to the censor he was told the printing won't get the necessary authorization. Abba Gäbrä Iyyäsus suggests that the cause of it was that he didn't praise the Derg as was customary at that time, but the true reason might have been politic. During the Derg regime there was a certain trend in circles dealing with linguistics in Ethiopia to situate the Ethiopian languages mainly within their African – and in particular Cushitic – context and, consequently, to minimize their historical links with Semitic, especially since the Semitic perspective was identified with the European scholarship on Ethiopia. After Eritrea's independence the author was forced to leave Addis Abäba. He settled in Asmara, where he translated his book into Tigrinya. Probably it is the first book on the history of Gə'əz ever published in Tigrinya.

The major part of the book (pp. 16–102) is dedicated to the description of Gə'əz as a member of the Semitic language family according to the extant Western literature (Chamito-Semitic is mentioned en passant). The book contains surveys of the following ancient Semitic languages: Aramaic, Hebrew, Arabic Accadian, Ugaritic and Epigraphic South Arabian. Comparative tables of selected lexical items (written in the Ethiopian script), and a reduced table of personal pronouns and of the imperative (p. 99) are provided and similarities and divergences are stressed. The evolution of the Ethiopian script from the ESA alphabet is extensively documented. Further, Tigre and Tigrinya are defined as the direct descendants of Gə'əz and comparative tables of some words in these languages and in the other Semitic languages as well as in Gə'əz are established. By the way, an interesting neologism introduced by the author consists in using a suffix *-it* to mark the names of languages, thus for instance: ግረቢት Arabic, ኡጋሪቲት Ugaritic, ፋሲት Russian, etc. The author explains this usage by the fact that also in other Semitic tongues the names of language are rendered by a feminine suffix (p. 45–46), but it rather reminds one of the perfectly identical Hebrew forms. In Tigrinya *-it* is not exactly a feminine suffix but rather the feminine ending of the participle of the form *qätali*¹ to which the feminine

¹ W. LESLAU, *Documents tigrigna*, Paris: Klincksieck 1941:28.

suffix *-t* was added. As a matter of fact, *-it* is an Amharic feminine suffix and it is surprising that the author should borrow from Amharic, considering his attitude towards this language.

Amharic is absent from the list and from the discussion in the chapter on “The languages related to Gəʿəz found in its vicinity” (p. 103–112). The list includes Argobba, Gafat, Gurage and Harari and so does the short comparative word sample which exemplifies some phonological correlations between them and Gəʿəz. The author explains that he didn’t have enough time to include the history of the evolution of Amharic and that he leaves it to someone who will do it in the future, but that anyway Amharic has so many words which are not of Semitic origin that “there were scholars (such as Aharon Aëscoly) who didn’t count it among the Semitic languages” (p. 110).

The book ends with a general word list in Gəʿəz and Tigrinya (p. 114–131), some short vocabularies arranged according to subject, and a few elementary notions of Gəʿəz grammar. These are followed by 18 exercises of conversation between the teacher and his assistant or his students, or between the students themselves, to be translated from Gəʿəz into Tigrinya or *vice versa*. These dialogues, which deal with perfectly lay matters, illustrate the author’s assumption that Gəʿəz, like Hebrew, could be brought back to life.

Olga Kapeliuk

ተክላ ተስፋይ, TÄKKĀʾÄ TÄSFAY (Hrsg.), ዘመናዊ ፡ መዝገበ ፡ ቻላት ፡ ትግርኛ *Zämänawi mǝzgäbä-qalat tǝgrǝñña* [Modernes Wörterbuch des Tigrinischen], ሳምራ: ሳሕተላንት ክፍሪ, 1999; xxix, 1083 S.

Dieses neue umfassende monolinguale Wörterbuch des Tigrinischen (s. auch die Besprechung von L. RICCI in *RSE*, 43 (1999) [2000], S. 245–247) ist vollständig in (äthiopischer oder) Geʿez-Schrift verfaßt – bis auf einige Literaturangaben und den englischen Nebentitel “Tekie Tesfai: *A Modern Tigrinya Dictionary*, Asmara: Hidri Publishers” (mit Postanschrift) auf der Rückseite des tigrinischen Titelblatts. Das Wörterbuch wendet sich an die tigrinophonen Eritreer, welche bislang schon auf das monolinguale Wörterbuch ልሳነ አግዳዚ ፣ *Lässanä-ʾAgʿazi* von ግርማ ጽዮን መብራህቱ ፣ Gërma-Şəyon Mäbrahtu (፳ሳምራ 1976 [፳.፩.፳. = 1983/84]) zurückgreifen konnten. Den tigrinophonen Äthiopiern stehen die beiden hervorragenden monolingualen Wörterbücher zur Verfügung, die in den letzten Jahren in Äthiopien erschienen sind, nämlich ገብረ እግዚአብሔር ቢሆን ተክላ ፣ Gäbrä-ʾEgziʾabəher Bihon Täklü: ናዕላ መዝገበ ቻላት ትግርኛ ብትግርኛ ፣ *Naṣla mǝzgäbä-qalat tǝgrǝñña bə-tǝgrǝñña*, o.O. [Mäkäälä] 1987 ፳.፩.፳. [= 1994/95]