



Aethiopia 14 (2011)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

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Review

GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI (ed.), *History and Language of the Tigre-
Speaking Peoples*

Aethiopia 14 (2011), 274–278

ISSN: 1430–1938

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

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GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI (ed.), *History and Language of the Tigre-Speaking Peoples*. Proceedings of the International Workshop, Naples, February 7–8, 2008 = Studi Africanistici Serie Etiopica 8, Naples: Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, 2010, IV + 157 pp. ISBN: 978–88–95044–68–2.

This collection of papers is the outcome of an International Workshop held in Naples in 2008 in which participated some 20 scholars specialized in the traditional fields of study such as archeology, history, philology and linguistics, in relation to the speakers of Təgre in Eritrea. In his opening speech the convener of the Workshop and editor of the Volume under review, Gianfrancesco Lusini, explained that a meeting on such a relatively restricted subject was justified since it provided a good opportunity of exchange of information in diverse fields of study, and at the same time he expressed the feeling of frustration, common to many an Ethiopianist, about the International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies (ICES). He writes (p. 4): “Now, almost fifty years after the first ICES, this type of event has begun to show its limitations. A gigantic and sometimes chaotic conference claiming to deal with everything about Ethiopia and Eritrea can hardly represent a real exchange of scientific information.” It should be kept in mind that ICES itself was established in 1959 by scholars of traditional disciplines in Ethiopian studies who felt that they could not fit anymore into the infinitely expanding framework of the International Congress of Orientalists, which dealt with cultures and languages of peoples literally from Dakar to Kamtchatka. Many splits from ICES occurred in their turn, during the last four decades or so. Just to quote a few international meetings, without mentioning local seminars and workshops: The Hamito-Semitic Congress, based in Germany is now after its 8th Conference; The International Conference on Cushitic and Omotic Linguistics is preparing for its 6th conference; SOSTEJE (Society for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry), established in Oxford in 1991, held its 9th meeting in the summer of 2010, and so did, apparently the last to come, the III. Internationales Forschungskolloquium zum Horn von Afrika at the Freie Universität Berlin.

In his inaugurating lecture (pp. 3–12) Gianfrancesco Lusini raised the intriguing question whether there were other speakers of a Semitic language in the Təgre area before the arrival of the Sabeans. Archeological findings going back to the mid-2nd millennium, well before the arrival of the Sabeans, show affinities between the material culture of that region and the South Arabian coast. However, in my opinion, the linguistic material quoted by the author in support of this theory is too scanty and could be the result of later contacts. The author himself concedes that all the Ethiosemitic lan-

guages descend from one and the same ancestor but some Prothoethiopic features might have persisted in Təgre and were lost or changed in Gəʿəz. But one has to keep in mind that the written version of Gəʿəz, with which we are familiar, might have been a standardized form of a somewhat different colloquial speech or, alternately, only one of several spoken dialects.

From the remaining eleven papers only two are devoted to non-linguistic matters: one under the sub-heading of Archeology and Ancient History and the other under the sub-heading of Modern History. In the first one, entitled “Between Nile Valley, Red Sea and highlands: Remarks on the archeology of the Tigre area” (pp. 15–30) the author, Andrea Manzo, admits that there was no systematic archeological exploration in the Təgre speaking area since the last decades of the 19th and first decades of the 20th century. The author describes instead exhaustively the findings in the surrounding regions such as the Eritrean-Sudanese border area to the west, Hamasien to the south and the Eritrean coast to the east and, together with the initial findings in the northern highlands, analyzes the archeological information systematically and places it in historical context. In the article on modern history Jonathan Miran (pp. 32–50) offers a substantial overview of the religious, economic and political situation of the Təgre between the end of the *Zämänä mäsafənt* and the establishment of the Italian colony of Eritrea. Despite its trendy title “Constructing and deconstructing the Tigre frontier space in the long nineteenth century”, which could raise a certain apprehension as to the degree of theorizing, the author succeeds in presenting a coherent picture based on detailed information and mentions many interesting subjects for further research.

All the remaining articles deal with linguistics in historical or synchronic perspective. According to the eminent Polish linguist, Andrzej Zaborski, in his contribution “The oldest records of the Tigre language” (pp. 53–59) the most ancient Təgre words which have been recorded, apart from a name already mentioned in ʿEzana’s inscriptions, are tribal and place names transmitted by Arab historians and geographers of the 9th and 10th centuries, in connection with the Beḡa tribes. The author offers an Ethiosemitic etymology to a few hitherto unidentified ethnonyms and connects them to the social structure of a society of lords and vassals (which, by the way, was maintained among the Təgre until modern times). In an impressive piece of erudition “Tigre and south Ethiopic, a reconsideration” (pp. 61–69) Paolo Marrassini contests some of the previous classifications of South Semitic (SS) and states (p. 63) that: “at least in principle, any feature in common between Ethiopia and the rest of SS should be ascribed to a common period before the arrival of the Semites in Africa”. Based on the absence of a historical definite article in Ethiosemitic and the multiform definite articles in

North-West Semitic he proposes the end of the 2nd millennium B.C. as the time of the separation of Ethiopic from South Semitic.

The somewhat puzzling question of the Təgre relative particle *la* is examined by Bogdan Burtea in his paper “Some remarks on the Təgre particle *la* in a historical perspective” (pp. 71–80). The author seeks the source of the *la*, used in Təgre both as the definite article and relative particle, in the preposition *la* in the Gəʿəz definite constructions: *wäld-u lä-nəgus* and *sämäy-o lä-bərhan ʿälätä*. The Gəʿəz preposition *la* would have become a focussing particle which, in its turn, evolved into a demonstrative element in Təgre. One wonders what was wrong with the existing, more traditional explanation, according to which *la* belongs to the series of the Təgre demonstratives ʾalli, ʾallā, ʾallom, ʾallan.¹ Is it a normal linguistic process, with all respect due to the miraculous and omnipresent process of focussing, for a preposition or even for a mark of the *energeticus* mood in front of a verb, to become the definite article and hence the relative particle? Another historical study “Archaisms and innovations of Tigre prepositions” (pp. 81–88) by Tesfay Tewelde is devoted to the etymology of Təgre prepositions. The author provides not only Semitic etymologies but also turns to ancient Egyptian. His conclusion (p. 88) that the prepositions: “do not indicate any particular relationship of Təgre with any E(ritrean and) E(thiopian) S(emitic) or Northern EES languages. In fact, Təgre prepositions share archaic features with their counterparts in other Semitic or Afro-Asiatic languages” inevitably leads us back to the question of Semitic presence in the Horn of Africa before the arrival of the Sabaeans.

Rainer Voigt finds an affinity between labialization in Təgre and in Gurage. He explains in “Object suffixes and labialization in Tigre” (pp. 91–100) how in Təgre verbal forms such as, for instance, the imperative masculine plural with 3rd person masculine singular object pronoun *qətōl-ō* “kill him!”, from **qatalu-o*, the vowel of the second radical is rounded. According to his analysis the transfer of the labialization into the root is not caused by the suffixation of the 3rd person masculine singular object pronoun, as is the case in Gurage, because the labialization also happens with the unrounded feminine suffix pronoun *ā*, e.g. *hədōg-ā* “leave (m. pl.) her alone!”. Hence the rounding of the vowel *a* in the middle of the root is due to the absorption of the plural ending *u*. One may mention yet another difference between Təgre and Gurage which is the absence of labialized consonants in the former² against the labialized series of velars and labials in the latter. In Təgre the labialization

¹ If the author is bothered by the vowel *a* we may quote the masculine singular Hebrew demonstrative *ha-llab* ‘that’ and the relative series of Classical Arabic *al-la-di*, *al-la-ti* etc.

² See S. RAZ, *Tigre Grammar and Texts* = Afroasiatic Dialects 4, Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1983, pp. 4–5.

affects the vowel and not the consonant therefore the term “rounding” could perhaps be used, keeping the term labialization for the consonants. The next paper by Klaus Wedekind “A report on the automatic parsing of Tigre: Lots of morphology and bits of syntax” (pp. 101–109) presents a project of collecting data bases with lexical and morphological information which was undertaken in 2000 as a part of a machine translation project, but was abandoned in 2003 when the author left Eritrea.

The three last articles, under the sub-heading “Dialectology and Related Languages”, deal all with the language spoken in the Dahlak Archipelago. The question whether there is a separate Dahalik language or is it a dialect of Təgre has become one of the most hotly debated subjects in Ethiosemitic linguistics during the last ten or fifteen years. As a matter of fact, in the absence of a political boundary and of particular ethnic features, the decision lies with the linguist alone. Didier Morin in his contribution “Territoriality in a linguistic perspective: The Beni-Amer case” (pp. 147–157) sides with treating Dahalik as a dialect of Təgre based on 26 specific linguistic features it shares with other Təgre dialects. The two other authors, Salih Mahmud Idris from the Ministry of Education in Eritrea and the French linguist Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle, who perseveres in imposing the existence of a new Ethiosemitic language, are in favour of treating Dahalik as a language in its own right.³ In his paper “Is Dahalik a dialect of Tigre” (pp. 113–125) Salih Mahmud Idris summarizes a research project run by him and by Martine Vanhove in which Dahalik was compared with other dialects of Təgre. In all the categories checked by the project the common element in Dahalik on the one hand and in other Təgre dialects on the other hand was much lower. Thus, for instance, while the percentage of identical words between five Təgre dialects was between 86 % and 97 % in Dahalik it reached only between 37 % and 43 %. Also a comprehension test of a Təgre text showed a comprehension rate between 89 % and 99 % among the speakers of the five Təgre dialects against 23 % to 51 % among the Dahalik. Simeone-Senelle in “The specificity of the Dahalik language within the Afro-Semitic languages” (pp. 127–145) bases the specificity of Dahalik

³ Treating dialects as independent languages is not restricted to Dahalik in Ethiopian linguistics. Gurage what was considered in the past a dialect cluster is now classified as a group of a dozen languages in a list on Semitic language classification by A. FABER in “Genetic Subgrouping of the Semitic Languages”, in: R. HETZRON (ed.), *The Semitic Languages* = Routledge Language Family Descriptions, London – New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 3–15 (here 6). The strange thing is that Arabic, spoken with countless variations from Afganistan to Mauritania by two hundred million souls, receives a single mention on the same list against a dozen names for the Gurage languages.

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mainly on its verbal system and in particular on the use of the verb *hade* (perfect)/*haddi* (imperfect) “want” as a much used auxiliary.

To sum up: a very interesting collection of articles on mostly new, rarely tackled subjects of research in Ethiopian studies. Let’s hope that this first Workshop will be followed by others and that despite the material difficulties more scholars will direct their interest and scientific efforts to this northern extremity of the Ethio-Eritrean area.

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GALINA ALEXANDROVNA BALASCHOVA, *Современная драматургия Эфиопии* [*Sovremennaja dramaturgija Efiopii*, “Moderne dramatische Dichtung Äthiopiens”] + bibliographische Daten. Moskau: Afrika Institut der Russischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008. 224 S., 35 Farb- und 8 Schwarzweißabbildungen. ISBN 978–5–91298–42–8.

Die ersten literarischen Werke auf Amharisch erschienen im 14. Jahrhundert, amharische Literatur als Genre begann aber erst im 19. Jahrhundert eine wichtige Rolle zu spielen. Im 20. Jahrhundert befand sich Äthiopien im Zentrum des politischen Interesses verschiedener europäischer Länder, was weitgehende Auswirkungen auf das soziale Leben des Landes hatte. Die intellektuelle Elite Äthiopiens adaptierte neue europäische Literaturgenres (u.a. die dramatische Dichtung), die vorher in Äthiopien nicht bekannt waren. Diese auf Amharisch verfassten Werke waren für die Zeit ungewöhnlich, weil sie nicht für kirchliche Zwecke gedacht, sondern potenziell an das “einfache Volk” gerichtet waren.

Es gibt mehrere Forschungen, die der Genesis “neuer” äthiopischer Literatur gewidmet sind, vor allem die Werke von Kane und Molvaer.¹ Sie bieten eine gute Übersicht über die äthiopische Literatur, ohne jedoch dem Genre des Schauspiels besondere Aufmerksamkeit zu schenken.

Balaschova, die zurzeit am Afrika-Institut der Russischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Moskau arbeitet, möchte mit ihrem Werk diese Lücke schließen und konzentriert sich auf Drama und Theaterkunst Äthiopiens. Balaschova hat über 20 Jahre Lehrerfahrung in der amharischen Sprache und nahm an mehreren Forschungsreisen nach Äthiopien teil, wo sie vor Ort zum einen moderne Theaterraufführungen miterleben, und sich zum anderen mit verschiedenen dramatischen Werken auf Amharisch auseinandersetzen konnte. Die von ihr zusammengestellte Bibliografie enthält über

¹ T.L. KANE, *Ethiopian Literature in Amharic*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1975; R.K. MOLVAER, *Black Lions*, Asmara – Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1997.