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Review

WOLF LESLAU, *Ethiopic Documents: Argobba. Grammar and Dictionary*

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Reviews

Hierarchie, unter Beobachtung der regionalen Besonderheiten. Die Rezensentin wünscht diesem Fachbuch die ihm gebührende Aufmerksamkeit.

Verena Böll

WOLF LESLAU, *Ethiopic Documents: Argobba. Grammar and Dictionary* = Aethiopistische Forschungen 47. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997. 274 S. Preis DM 148,-. ISBN 3-447-03955-8.

Argobba is, as LESLAU says in his introduction, one of the least known Ethiopian Semitic languages. LESLAU's own publications prior to this volume, dating from between 1949 and '60, form the largest amount of published material on the language, and all are based on his original fieldwork carried out in 1946 and especially 1950, as is the present volume. The publication of the present volume now follows closely on the heels of a brief survey carried out by the Survey of Little-known Languages of Ethiopia (SLE) and published as Linguistic Report no. 22 at the end of 1994. LESLAU had this latest material available to him when he was preparing his volume for publication, though apparently without the final page, which contains the conclusion of an English–Amharic–Argobba wordlist and a small map of the languages of the Argobba region. Data from the SLE Report is cited throughout and contrasted with LESLAU's own data where the two sources differ.

LESLAU is conscious that his own material is incomplete: there are gaps in the basic morphological and syntactic description, and not a few inconsistencies between what is observable from the tables and the examples provided. For instance, the ending of the 1st singular of the perfect is given only as *-ku* on p. 45, but examples illustrating various assimilations between this ending and the stem-final consonant suggest that variants *-k^w* and even, apparently, *-k* exist: *šeqq^w* < *šet-k^w* 'I sold', *hegk* < *hed-k* glossed (p. 46) as both 'I went' and 'you (masc.) went'. Similarly, in the table on p. 92 the prepositional suffix pronoun of the 3rd masculine of the 'bä- set' is given as *-ow* as in *mäsäkkärow* 'he testified against him', but examples on pp. 93/94 show variants *-w* (*yämmiggännäwən saṭən* 'the box in which it is found', *yaräggäzawən arəh* 'the place in which he stayed'), *-^wo* (*yämmättäččawät^wo k^waša* 'the ball with which you are playing'), *-bu* (*moldobul* 'it is plentiful in it'), *-bbo* (*yäbällibbon harəh* 'the place in which they ate'). These inconsistencies are unfortunate, and the majority would seem to arise from the nature of the transcription which is not always strictly phonemic

but allows for the marking of some broad phonetic, sub-phonemic features: so, the marking of the verbal ending as both presumably fully syllabic *-ku* and labialised *-k^w*: so, ‘I died’ appears as *mo^gku* on p. 5, but *mogg^w* on p. 46. In the same way, one might question whether pharyngeal *ħ*, included in the consonant chart on p. 1, is a phoneme; it occurs only as double *ħħ*, as a contraction of *t+ħ* in the *tä-* stem of verbs and then only in one dialect where in the dialect recorded in the SLLE Report long *ħħ* appears (which for that dialect would negate the statement of LESLAU’s that “all consonants may be geminated except *ħ*”). The reader might also wonder about the inclusion of glottalised *ʃ* in the same consonant chart, when an examination of the vocabulary at the end of the volume yields no examples. Glottalised *ʃ* [ʃ̣] is not included in the phonemic chart in the SLLE Report, nor indeed in LESLAU’s own 1959 article *A Preliminary Description of Argobba*. These are mostly, however, only small matters. Students of Ethiopian Semitic will all be grateful to LESLAU for at long last making available the full corpus of his Argobba data now, as he says, he “will have no other occasion to reexamine” the language in the field.

The volume follows the familiar pattern of LESLAU’s descriptions of other Ethiopian Semitic languages. Following a brief introduction outlining the circumstances (and discomforts) of his data collection almost 50 years ago, the grammar part of the book proceeds through sections on phonology and morphology, including remarks on syntax, (noun, adjective, pronoun, numerals, copula and verb of existence, verb, positional relations, clauses and conjunctions, adverbs, vocative and exclamation, enclitics) to a comparative inventory of Argobba and Amharic and a summary of the distinctive features of Argobba and Amharic. This latter section is particularly cogent because of the on-going question of the status of Argobba. LESLAU, like BENDER before him, though on the basis of a more considered body of data, concludes that Argobba is a dialect of Amharic. ZELEALEM LEYEW in the SLLE Report came to the same conclusion. The question of dialect of, or sister language to Amharic is in itself an open one dependent on how ‘dialect’ is defined, and like LESLAU himself one can settle on some criterion of mutual intelligibility as the defining factor. Percentage of vocabulary in common is another criterion, and LESLAU’s own analysis indicates as much as an 87% common vocabulary. Certainly, the reader is struck by the many instances where an Argobba phrase or sentence is almost the same as its Amharic equivalent, e.g. *yalmäṭṭa andäḥona bəččayän əbedalluh* ‘if he does not come, I shall go alone’, or *ədawən saykäfəl beda* ‘he left without paying his debts’ would be virtually the same in Amharic. On the other hand, there are some substantial differences between the two even in basic forms, e.g. de-

monstratives (Arg. *hud* and [*h*]od, Amh. *yəb* and *ya*); independent personal pronouns (*äy*, *ank*, *anč*, *kəssu*, *kəssa*, etc., as against Amh. *əne*, *antä*, *anči*, *əssu*, *əsswa*, etc.); the 2nd feminine ending (possessive, subject marker in the gerund and the perfect of some verb classes) *-ih*, Amh. *-əš*; negative copula (Arg. *abunə'u*, Amh. *aydälläm*); and it would seem doubtful that sentences like *merun tagännē čugga lihanğän mätta* 'after he had met his friend, he came to see me', or *su simmettät hakim əndihanğe yəzzorel* 'when a man is ill he needs a doctor to see him' would be intelligible to an Amharic speaker, where only one word in each example would be identical. Incidentally, it does seem odd that in his brief discussion of the relationship between Argobba and Amharic LESLAU makes no reference to HETZRON's 1972 monograph *Ethiopian Semitic*, where a short section is devoted to the question. HETZRON does not commit himself to 'dialect' or 'language', but simply says "within the T(ransversal) S(outh) E(thiopic) group, Amharic and Argobba form a closer unit," which is indisputable.

The volume continues with a comparison of LESLAU's own material and that presented in the SLLE Report. It perhaps should not be surprising that at times substantial differences are found between the two, e.g. 3rd person pronouns (LESLAU) *kəssu*, *kəssa*, *kəssäm*, and (SLLE) *əwwät*, *əyyat*, *əlläh* / *əlläm*. The SLLE Report is unfortunately very brief and there are many lacunae and, sadly, not a few inconsistencies, but it is the most recent record of Argobba. LESLAU's initial investigations in 1950 were carried out in the region of Aliyu Amba and Ch'anno, and subsequently amongst traders from the Ankober region living in Addis Ababa. The SLLE team focussed on Shewa-Robit, over 30 miles to the north-east of the area where LESLAU had worked. The villages where Argobba survives are strung out along the eastern escarpment of the Shoan plateau, and this amount of disparity between local speech forms of an endangered and indeed probably moribund language spoken in enclaves and subject to dominant languages (in this case, Amharic and Oromo) is not unusual.

Closing the volume are reprints of 4 of the 5 articles published by LESLAU on Argobba between 1949 and 1960. The one article omitted is presumably the section on Argobba in his *Studies in Ethiopic Classification* which appeared in the proceedings of the 1959 Ethiopian Studies Conference in Rome. It is probably good to have these reprinted here, though in the 48 pages that they together consume there is a great deal of repetition of what has gone before in the main body of the book. Finally, LESLAU provides an Argobba-English and an English-Argobba wordlist, incorporating his own material and that published in the SLLE Report.

While the book provides an account of the basic facts of Argobba morphology and some syntax in an easily accessible and familiar format, there is a number of infelicitous statements and inconsistencies that the reader should be aware of, some of which have already been mentioned. Some of these may be simply typographical errors, though others could suggest that the book was compiled in something of a hurry without the attention to detail that might have been expected. Some errors are comparatively trivial and it is perhaps unkind on the reviewer's part to mention them, but a statement such as "Ankober was the capital of Ethiopia in the 18th century" does need correcting; Ankober was, of course, the capital of the Kingdom of Shoa in the 18th and 19th centuries, and indeed could be said to have been (one of) the capital(s) of Ethiopia under Menilek II until the move to Enṭotto in 1881 and later the founding of Addis Ababa. Somewhat more serious is the statement on p. 3 §5.3 that **ābV* may become *āha*, where the illustrative examples (*qāddāha* but *qāddāhād* and *qādāhi*) clearly indicate that the rule should be stated in the more general terms: *ābV* optionally > *āhV*, and lower down the page, in §6.2, the statement that *VhV* may become (C)*ī* needs redrawing as C[V]hV > C*ī*, to accommodate such instances as the pair *yālāhsāl* and *yālisāl* 'he licks' as well as *yarhəq* and *yariq* 'it is far'. In §26.1 on p. 20, the comparison of the 2nd masculine independent pronoun *ank* 'you' with Tigrinya *nəss-əkə* seems inappropriate; the latter is of course built on a noun base with the possessive suffix, whereas the Argobba form shows the substitution of the dental ending of such as Amharic *antä* by the velar of the possessive suffix, while retaining the independent pronoun base *an-*. The comparison with Harari *akək* and more especially such as Chäha *akə* is more apposite. The corresponding feminine form is ambiguous as *anč* could derive directly from original *anti*, and not just from substituted **anki*, as LESLAU intimates. Somewhat careless are statements such as that on p. 74 §74.1, that "verbs of the 1st subdivision go back to verbs with an original last radical *w*." where amongst the immediately following examples LESLAU himself cites *qārra*, which "occurs in Tigrinya *qry*." It may well be that the *balla*-type has as its underlying origin verbs *tertia* *w*, and those of the *šäčča*-type verbs *tertia* *y*, but the evidence suggests that the better explanation is that in the *šäčča*-type the palatal feature of the second consonant of the stem affects the vowel of the endings of the 2nd masculine and 3rd feminine of the perfect (*-ah*, *-äd* in type 1, but *-eh*, *-ed* in type 2), which is seemingly the only difference between the two subdivisions. Of course, the incompleteness of the data that LESLAU admits may conceal further differences. It might be significant, however, that in Amharic original *tertia* *w* and *tertia* *y* verbs are conflated into the one inflexional type. LESLAU's state-

ment in the following paragraph that “a palatalizable verb of this class that is not palatalized is *fässa* ‘break wind’ (G. *fäsäwä*) due to the original radical *w*,” seems rather muddled as *w* would not be expected to cause palatalisation anyway, no more than in the Amharic cognate *fässa*.

Finally, there are two analyses that I believe are not proposed in the best way and which consequently require comment. In discussing the inflexion of the gerund, on p. 53 §54.2., LESLAU analyses the 1st singular form *sädb-əč* as from base *sädbädä-* on analogy with the other persons, plus an ending **-če* “presenting the originally palatalized *-te* represented in Argobba as *-de*.” Surely, rather than propose a hypothetical repetition of the *-t* formative, the analysis should be simply base *sädbət[ä]-* (before voicing of *t > d*) + ending *-e/-yä* and subsequent palatalisation and loss of the final vowel to give *sädbəč*? Secondly, in describing the addition of the object suffix pronouns to the 1st plural imperfect, in the footnote to the table at the top of page 91, §87.3, LESLAU remarks on the position of the pronoun suffix in such forms as *algädləkkən*, *algädləččən* and *algädləkkumən* ‘we will kill you’ (masc., fem., plur., respectively). Presumably he is implying the object suffix pronouns in these forms precede rather than follow the *-ən* suffix which is part of the subject marking. When these are contrasted with such as *algädlənem* ‘we will kill them’ and *algädləne* ‘we will kill him’, it is obvious that in underlying and regular **algädlən + -k/-č/-kum* (‘hard’ suffixes because of original postconsonantal position) the suffix pronoun and the final *-n* of the base have assimilated to give **algädləkk*, **algädləčč*, **algädləkkum*, to which the *-ən* marker of the 1st plural has subsequently been re-added, probably because after the assimilation it was felt to be “missing”.

An interesting issue which LESLAU does not tackle, and the investigation of which would need more complete data than currently available, is the variation in form of certain object suffix pronouns added to verbs, most notably the 2nd person suffixes. This is not the place to go into details, but the 2nd masculine and 2nd plural show variation between suffixes in *-h* and *-k* with something of an unexpectedly skewed distribution. For instance, whilst it is not surprising that the *-h* forms occur after original final vowels (but note *-kum* after final *-u*!) and the *-k* forms after original final consonants, it is quite unexpected that *-k* and *-kum* are also found after the *-o* ending of the 3rd masc. gerund. The 2nd feminine object suffixes are even more surprising with variation between *-ih*, *-č* and *-š*, again with a rather odd distribution, and perhaps significantly in the light of the distribution of the *-k* forms for the masculine and plural, with *-č* occurring after final vowel *-o*. This is all very surprising when compared with the other Transversal South Ethiopic languages, where only Silt’i has any variation, in the 2nd

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masculine object suffix between postconsonantal *-ka* and postvocalic *-ba*, and in the 2nd plural between *-kum* and *-mmu* in the same contexts.

Students of Ethiopian Semitic should rightly be grateful to LESLAU for publishing his Argobba material, adding yet again to the outstanding corpus of data on Ethiopian Semitic languages that he has published in almost 60 years of research activity. In his introduction to the present volume he echoes the recommendation of the SLLE team and makes a plea for Ethiopian scholars to undertake the task of investigating Argobba as thoroughly as possible before it is completely extinct. The opportunities and resources for carrying this out are now greater than ever before, and it is to be hoped that the SLLE work was only the preliminary. However, as the demands on linguists and language development teams in Ethiopia today are to tackle what must be the priorities of developing materials for and promoting the host of larger languages, realistically and sadly the recording of the moribund Argobba probably comes low down on their list.

David Appleyard

WOLF LESLAU: *Zway. Ethiopic Documents. Grammar and Dictionary*. (Aethiopistische Forschungen. Begründet von Ernst Hammerschmidt. Herausgegeben von Siegbert Uhlig. Band 51) Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1999. XXIII + 321 Seiten, 4° Leinen, DM 198,-. ISBN 3-447-04162-5

In den Aethiopistischen Forschungen ist WOLF LESLAU nunmehr mit vier Bänden vertreten. Als Fortsetzung der Reihe "Ethiopians Speak. Studies in Cultural Background" erschien der dem Muher gewidmete Part IV 1981 als Band 11 und der dem Chaha-Ennemor gewidmete Part V 1983 als Band 16, und mit dem neuen Untertitel "Ethiopic Documents. Grammar and Dictionary" war 1997 in Band 47 das Argobba beschrieben worden.

Das Zway gehört innerhalb der äthio-semitischen Sprachen zur Ostgurage-Gruppe, deren übrige bekannte Vertreter das Səlti und Wolane sind, während das Ulbarag (Urbarag) und Inneqor bzw. Azarnat-Mugo noch nicht eingehender erforscht worden sind. Neuerdings sind diese Dialekte außer als Ostgurage auch als Silte-Gruppe bezeichnet worden, so von ERNST-AUGUST GUTT in *The Semitic Languages*, edited by ROBERT HETZRON, London-New York 1997, S. 509–534, wo einleitend vermerkt wird, daß das Zway innerhalb dieser Gruppe am meisten abweicht und gegenüber den anderen Dialekten wesentliche Unterschiede