



Aethiopia 18 (2015)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

ALESSANDRO BAUSI, Universität Hamburg

Review

GROVER HUDSON, *Northeast African Semitic: Lexical Comparisons and Analysis*

Aethiopia 18 (2015), 297–299

ISSN: 2194–4024

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

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig

Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

- AE* *Annales d'Éthiopie*, Paris 1955ff.
- ÄthFor* Äthiopistische Forschungen, 1–35, ed. by E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, 36–40, ed. by S. UHLIG (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (1–34), 1977–1992; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (35–40), 1994–1995).
- AethFor* Aethiopistische Forschungen, 41–73, ed. by S. UHLIG (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2011); 74–75, ed. by A. BAUSI and S. UHLIG (*ibid.*, 2011f.); 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI (*ibid.*, 2012ff.).
- AION* *Annali dell'Università degli studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale'*, Napoli: Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale' (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.
- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London, 1917ff.).
- CSCO* Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.
- EAE* S. UHLIG, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; III: He–N; in cooperation with A. BAUSI, eds, IV: O–X (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); A. BAUSI in cooperation with S. UHLIG, eds, V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).
- EMML* Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
- JAH* *The Journal of African History*, Cambridge 1960ff.
- JES* *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
- OrChr* *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.
- PdP* *La Parola del Passato. Rivista di studi classici*, Napoli 1946ff.
- PICES 8* TADDESE BEYENE, ed., *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa (26–30 November) 1984*, I–II (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies–Frankfurt am Main: Frobenius Institut, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, 1988–1989).
- PICES 10* C. LEPAGE and É. DELAGE, eds, *Études éthiopiennes: Actes de la X^e Conférence internationale des études éthiopiennes, Paris, 24–28 août 1988* (Paris: Société française pour les études éthiopiennes, 1994).
- PO* *Patrologia Orientalis*, 1903ff.
- RIÉ* É. BERNAND, A.J. DREWES, and R. SCHNEIDER, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, I: *Les documents*, II: *Les planches* (Paris: (Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres) Diffusion de Boccard, 1991).
- RRALm* *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Roma, 1892ff.
- RSE* *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli, 1983ff.
- SAe* *Scriptores Aethiopici*.

Reviews

lativieren. Besonders interessant sind ihre Beobachtungen zum Kulturkontakt, zu den nicht so offensichtlichen Formen weiblicher Rhetorik und Selbstaussdruck sowie zu ihrem eigenen persönlichen Bewusstseinswandel. Aus diesen Gründen ist eine Lektüre auch für nicht mit Südäthiopien beschäftigte WissenschaftlerInnen sehr zu empfehlen.

Angela M. Müller, Universität Hamburg

GROVER HUDSON, *Northeast African Semitic: Lexical Comparisons and Analysis*, Porta Linguarum Orientalium, 26 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013). viii, 323 pp. Price: € 48.00. ISBN: 978-3-447-06983-0; ISSN: 0554-7342.

Grover Hudson's book belongs to the tradition of the lexicostatistical studies of Ethiopian Semitic (henceforth: ESe) languages. Moreover, this book is probably the most ambitious attempt at a lexicostatistical classification of ESe.

First brought to the attention of modern linguistics by Morris Swadesh in the 1950s, lexicostatistics carries out a quantitative comparative analysis of the relationship between languages based on lexical cognates. As such, lexicostatistics *counts* and assumes *to measure* the mutual affinity or distance (agreement or disagreement) between languages *in quantitative terms* in order to subclassify them, yet without implying any precise correlation between time and degree of differentiation. This further step is proper to glottochronology, which uses the methods of lexicostatistics but attempts to correlate increasing disagreement with increasing distance over time since languages are assumed to have split from a common ancestor language. A somewhat different field is linguistic palaeontology, that uses lexical evidence for historical (also non-linguistic) reconstruction. These latter aspects are not dealt with in this book, and glottochronological hypotheses in particular are cautiously discarded.¹

The book has a complex structure. Chapter 1, *Background* (pp. 1–55), introduces the themes and plan of the book, illustrates the Semitic languages of northeast Africa, namely, their diversity, the notions of language and dialect,

¹ Unfortunately, the index of the *EAE*, V (2015), has neither an entry for 'lexicostatistics' nor for 'glottochronology' nor for 'linguistic palaeontology', although the concepts occur in the work and at large in Ethiopian studies, and had in D. Cohen, M.L. Bender, H.C Fleming, and also in C. Ehret, important representatives, see by the latter, 'On the antiquity of agriculture in Ethiopia', *JAH*, 20 (1979), 161–177, and P. Marrassini, 'The Semites in Abyssinia: Onomastic and Lexicographical Notes', in L. Kogan, ed., *Studia Semitica*, Orientalia: Trudy Instituta vostočnyx kultur, 3/Orientalia: Papers of the Oriental Institute, 3 (Moscow: State University for the Humanities, 2003), 141–151; and Idem, 'Early Semites' in Ethiopia?', *RSE* n.s., 3 (2011 (2012)), 75–96.

and details on each of the ESe languages considered: thirty language varieties are briefly presented, roughly ordered according to geographical criteria with special attention given to questions of name, documentation, and the state of the art, particularly for the less documented languages. The ESe languages have obviously very different status and this is particularly true for a language documented for many centuries like Gəʿəz (p. 10) as opposed to all others. To say that this language ‘is known from inscriptions dated to some 2000 years ago’, whereas inscriptions are attested from the second/third centuries CE at the earliest, and substantially only from the fourth, that ‘Conventional wisdom has long considered Geʿez descendent from an Ancient South Arabian language’, while this hypothesis was as early criticised as from the 1950s, and in particular that ‘Our knowledge of Geʿez grammar and lexicon is mostly based on a considerable body of Geʿez manuscript literature dating from 1270–1770’, whereas many writings certainly antedate this period and certainly also some manuscripts (not to say that part of the lexicon of Aksumite inscriptions is obscure and not yet registered in lexica)—is rather vague. A more detailed presentation of the Gurage languages is given, together with a section on mutual intelligibility. The rest of the chapter is intended to introduce the methodological aspects of the research as well as details on history of lexicostatistics, with special reference to Marvin L. Bender’s important contribution.² For practical purposes only fifteen languages are considered: Tigre; Dahalik; Tigrinya; Gəʿəz; Gafat; Soddo and the Gogot, Dobbi and Galila dialects; Mesqan and the Urib dialect; Muher; Chaha and the Ezha, Gumer and Gura dialects; Inor and the Ener, Indeganya, Gyeta, Meger and Mesmes dialects; Silt’e and the Welene, Inneqor, and Ulbareg dialects; Zay; Harari; Argobba; Amharic. The *vexata quaestio* of language classification including a short discussion of lexicostatistical reliability concludes the chapter.

The following chapter 2, *Lexical comparisons* (pp. 57–104), is subdivided into two sections: the first section defines the corpus for the lexicostatistical analysis, consisting of a word list of two hundred and fifty items—far more extensive than the list of ninety-eight words used by Bender, although the latter extended his research to all Ethiopian languages—and some methodological premises. The second subsection (pp. 69–104) presents the corpus in the form of tables of comparison, where to each word of the list (for example, ‘able, be ~ (v)’, ‘all’, ‘animal, domestic’, etc.), the words of each of fourteen languages (all except Dahalik, for lack of data) are given. This same corpus is presented in chapter 3, *Dictionary* (pp. 105–277), in the form of a systematic comparative-etymological dictionary of the 3,301 words in the tables. The

² M.L. Bender, ‘The languages of Ethiopia. A new lexicostatistic classification and some problems of diffusion’, *Anthropological Linguistics*, 13 (1971), 165–288.

dictionary proper (pp. 108–236) is followed by refined indexes of Proto-Semitic, Proto-Agaw, Proto-East-Cushitic cognates, Proto-ESe lexical reconstructions, cognates sets, cognates shared by ESe and proto-languages, and ESe with Agaw cognates. The relatively short chapter 4, *Findings and Analysis* (pp. 279–297), provides a first estimation of the data, that is already of great interest: the final diagram tree (dendrogram) on p. 289 presents a classification into five groups, where North ESe is still a group, but not opposed to a unitary South ESe. The rich list of references and an index (pp. 299–323) conclude the volume, provided with four maps, 22 tables, and seven tree diagrams.

The author is honest in presenting also some points of criticism of lexicostatistical analysis,³ but more could have been said on the intrinsic nature of linguistic classification. In the end, lexicostatistics *counts*, but does not *weigh* (to some extent at least): comparing what is done in philology, lexicostatistics does not produce genealogical trees or *stemmata codicum*, but only correspondents of *dendrograms*, that are in the end not necessarily decisive for linguistic history without consideration of other aspects. A blatant example of this is Hudson's criticism of the importance of the Agaw substratum influence on ESe (pp. 290–291): this influence is very apparent in syntax and cannot be discarded on the basis of weak lexical evidence.

This book is going to remain an indispensable companion for lexicostatistics of ESe languages and provides a new benchmark in the field. A substantial mass of data has been collected and wonderfully organized. Leaving more comprehensive hypotheses to a later date (as Hudson states on p. 279, § 4.1 *Significance*, on the comparisons as 'evidence for ESe and Semitic linguistic history', will be better appreciated in a further publication), Hudson's main goal is to provide coherent and reliable evidence, and the book is a major contribution to general comparative lexicography and historical linguistics and to issues in linguistic classification and descriptive and comparative linguistics.

Alessandro Bausi, Universität Hamburg

³ Cf. for some points L. Kogan, 'Proto-Semitic Lexicon', in S. Weninger et al., eds, *The Semitic Languages. An International Handbook*, Handbook of Linguistics and Communications Science/Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft, 36 (Berlin–Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2011), 179–258, especially p. 243, 'Lexicostatistics in the Semitic domain', with reference to contributions by D. Cohen, M.L. Bender, C. Rabin, J. Rodgers, J. Hayes, yet omitting A. Kitchen et al., 'Bayesian phylogenetic analysis of Semitic languages identifies an Early Bronze Age origin of Semitic in the Near East', *Proceedings of the Royal Society (Biological)*, 276 (2009), 2703–2710, and, as also Hudson does, a main contribution by P. Fronzaroli, 'Prospettive di metodo statistico nella classificazione delle lingue semitiche', *RRALm*, ser. 8, 16 (1961), 348–380, also Idem, 'Metodi statistici nella classificazione delle lingue semitiche', *Comptes rendus du Groupe linguistique d'études chamito-sémitiques*, 9 (Mars 1962), 47–49.