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MARIA BULAKH, Russian State University for the Humanities

Review

SALEH MAHMUD IDRIS, *A Comparative Study of the Tigre Dialects*

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by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

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

Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA, like the preceding one, is partly monographic, with a section containing the proceedings of the Panel on Islamic Literature in Ethiopia: New Perspectives of Research, from the '19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies', held in Warsaw, Poland, on 24–28 August 2015.

Starting from this issue, the annual bibliography on Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics held from its inception in 1998 for eighteen years by Rainer Voigt is handed over, on Voigt's own will, to a pool of younger scholars, with the substantial support of the AETHIOPICA editorial team. I would like on this occasion to express the deep gratitude of the editorial board of AETHIOPICA and of all scholars in Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics to Rainer Voigt for his fundamental and valuable contribution.

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.
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).
EI² *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I–XII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2005).
EMML Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
JES *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
JSS *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Manchester 1956ff.
NEASt *Northeast African Studies*, East Lansing, MI 1979ff.
OrChr *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.
PICES 9 A.A. GROMYKO, ed., 1988, *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26–29 August 1986*, I–VI (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Central Department of Oriental Literature, 1988).
RSE *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli 1983ff.
ZDMG *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig–Wiesbaden–Stuttgart 1847ff.

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In the final contribution ‘The Tigre and their traditional beliefs and superstitions: a socio-linguistic survey’ (pp. 215–237) Saleh Mahmud Idris describes the main aspects of the traditional social structure of the Təgre people. The author maintains that, since the British administration in the 1940s, and especially since the beginning of the armed struggle in 1961, most of the principles of the ancient social structure were abandoned, but some of the popular superstitions remain. Much of the information is based on the official publication of the Eritrean Ministry of Information *Eritrea Profile* from the years 1996–1999. The author, having conducted a dialectological survey for the Ministry of Education in 1997, offers his own conclusions about dialect distribution of the Təgre language in Eritrea, namely: 1. Barka, Saḥəl, Marya Şállam; 2. Marya Qäyyaḥ, Bet Ğuk, Sänḥit; 3. Sämhar (pp. 223–224). It should be pointed out that the author, Saleh Mahmud Idris, does not include the language of the Dahlak Islands among the Təgre dialects, and that he was directly involved in the recent controversy⁵ about the status of this language, as to whether it should be considered a Təgre dialect or a separate, newly discovered, Semitic language.

Olga Kapeliuk, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

SALEH MAHMUD IDRIS, *A Comparative Study of the Tigre Dialects*, *Semitica et Semitohamitica Berolinensia*, 18 (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2015). 264 pp. Price: € 49.80. ISBN 978-3-8440-3438-7.

The publication of Saleh Mahmud Idris’s doctoral dissertation prepared under the supervision of Prof. Rainer Voigt in the Freie Universität Berlin is an important event in Ethiopian Semitic linguistics. Based on extensive field research, carried out in 2011 and 2012 in more than 20 localities, it presents an overview of the dialects of the Təgre language, the fifth largest Semitic language spoken mainly in Eritrea. (Although there are some Təgre speakers in eastern Sudan, the data for this investigation was collected only in Eritrea.) The author, himself a native speaker of Təgre, identifies the main dialects of this language, analyses the most important lexical and grammatical isoglosses and proposes a new classification of Təgre dialects. According to this, they are divided into three major groups: north-western (including the dialects of Ḥabab, ʿAd Təkles, Marya Qäyyaḥ, Marya Şállam, Beni ʿAmər), the south-eastern (including the dialects of Zula, Massawa, Gəndaʿ,

⁵ For which cf. the articles by Saleh Mahmud Idris, Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle and Didier Morin in G. Lusini’s work quoted in footnote 1 above (pp. 113–157).

Mashaḥalit, Mansa^o), and the so-called ‘transitional block’ (including Bet Ğuk, Səḥe, Mashaḥalit, Dərfo) which provides a geographic and linguistic link between the two former groups.

This classification differs considerably from the one offered by Saleh Mahmud Idris in his previous research.¹ Nevertheless the extreme differences between the Dahālík dialect and the continental Təgre dialects, emphasized in the previous research, is confirmed by this investigation. However, the author leaves the status of Dahālík as a dialect of Təgre or as a separate language open, which enables him to give the data on this lect in the same way as for the other varieties under scrutiny.

The book is divided into 1) an introduction, with the exposition of the methodology and an overview of the localities explored, 2) a review of previous research on Təgre, accompanied by a highly interesting sketch, describing the emergence of ‘standard’ written Təgre and listing most important publications in this language; 3) an analysis of collected word lists, accompanied by tables showing the quantity of shared and non-shared vocabulary between various dialects, as well as isogloss tables and maps, 4) an overview of phonetics and phonology, with identification of the main isoglosses (preservation of *ʃ* and *z* vs. mergers *ʃ* > *t* and *z* > *d*), 5) an overview of the most important morphological isoglosses, 6) an overview of the most prominent syntactic features showing variation across dialects, 7) sample texts from eight localities, 8) a summary, which recapitulates in condensed form the main results of the investigation. Furthermore, the book contains an extensive bibliography and, last but not least, a 500-word list from 14 dialects.

The linguistic data is presented with great precision and attention to detail. Thus, the description of the vowel system is accompanied by spectrograms confirming the author’s analysis of *ə* as a mid-central vowel. All statements concerning morphology and syntax are illustrated with numbered examples.

As well as evaluating the material collected relevant to the immediate aim of the research, the author occasionally comments on the diachronic background of pertinent features, on the history of Təgre migrations as reflected in oral traditions, on the evidence from medieval Arabic scholars, etc.

In the course of the investigation, the author has recorded more than 54 hours of various types of oral material: casual talk, folk-tales, poems and songs, descriptions of local customs, etc. Of these, eight texts have been transcribed and presented in the publication: a dialogue in the Beni ʿAmər dialect (recorded in Aqurdat), a talk on Algaden people and their history (recorded in the Algaden area), a folk-tale in the Bet Ğuk dialect, a narrative text in the Marya Şállam dialect, two stories in the Dahālík variety (recorded at two different

¹ Saleh Mahmud Idris, ‘Tigre Dialects’, *Journal of Eritrean Studies*, 1–2 (2005), 45–73.

localities of the Dahlak archipelago), and descriptions of the ceremony of betrothal and marriage (Sāmhar area) and of farming activities (Ḥabab). The texts are accompanied by a phonological transcription, glosses and an English translation. The principles of glossing are close to the Leipzig Glossing Rules, but meanings are given only for verbal and nominal roots (for adjectives, prepositions, coordinating conjunctions, etc., only the part of speech is indicated), which sometimes makes it difficult to understand the structure of the phrase. The translation gives pride of place to a faithful representation of the original text rather than to smoothness and literary style. The transcription is accompanied by numerous comments on the grammatical aspects involved, phenomena of spontaneous speech, etc. For text 6.4 information on the narrator is provided, but other texts lack any introductory notes (such a note, clarifying the general context of the talk, would be very welcome in the case of the text 6.2). A literary English version, added after each text, would have been useful both to the linguist aiming at a full understanding of the text and to the general reader interested in Təgre culture.

The book, a paperback edition, is small in size (21 x 14,8 cm) and employs very small fonts; sometimes the difference between certain symbols is hardly discernible. Misprints and other types of mistakes are not infrequent (p. 5: ‘recoding’ instead of ‘recording’; p. 187: ‘gout’ instead of ‘go out’; p. 86: fn. 133 repeats the information already given in the main text, etc.). Occasionally, one can even discern some inconsistencies in the presentation of the linguistic material (p. 124: Table 4.2. gives *-hu*, *-yu* as allomorphs of the 3 sg. masc. object suffix for the Beni °Amər dialect, while the text following the table mentions the allomorph *-u* as well; p. 140: a demonstrative pronoun is recorded as *labey* in the text, but is referred to as *lehay* in fn. 193 and as *labay* in table 4.3 on p. 117, so it remains unclear whether the forms in the text and in the footnote are misprints or local variants; p. 146: *lə-kāyəd* 3-step on.IMP.2SGM instead of 3SGM-step on.JUS.3SGM, cf. correct analysis of the same form on p. 143). This is all the more regrettable since this is the first time that these data have been brought to the attention of the interested reader. Certainly the valuable content of this book deserves more careful editing and a better presentation.

The book is worthy of the highest commendation as a pioneering work on the dialectology of an Ethiopian Semitic language. Indeed, before Saleh Mahmud Idris’s publication, no comprehensive research of this type has been carried out for any language of Ethiopia or Eritrea. Thus, apart from increasing our knowledge of Təgre, the book sets a high standard for future investigations on dialects of other major Ethiopian Semitic languages, such as Təgrəñña, Amharic, and Səlṭi.

The book will enrich our understanding of many phenomena of the Təgre language, and will bring to light many features of Təgre until now virtually

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unknown. It will prove an indispensable tool for anybody interested in Təgre language, and will be of great use for scholars dealing with Ethiopian Semitic linguistics, as well as for the dialectologists, historical linguists, and scholars of linguistic typology. The material presented will also be of value for future research on the history and ethnography of Eritrea.

Maria Bulakh, Russian State University for the Humanities

RICHARD J. HAYWARD and ESHETU CHABO, *Gamo–English–Amharic Dictionary: With an Introductory Grammar of Gamo* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014). 1172 pp., hardback. Price: € 198.00. ISBN: 978-3-447-10109-7.

The lexical documentation of Omotic languages is patchy and still in its early stages. Apart from Wolf Leslau's (1959) *Moča Dictionary*, a slim book with ~1,000 entries, lexical data on individual languages is, at best, to be found in research articles, in the appendices of grammars and in grey literature. The *Gamo–English–Amharic Dictionary* (hence GEAD) is thus an immensely valuable new publication. Omotic linguistics owes a lot to the first author, Richard J. Hayward (RJH), who has been engaged for more than three decades in the description of Omotic languages, especially of the Omoto group. The second author, Eshetu Chabo (EC), is a Gamo native speaker originally from Čenča (Čänča), living in London since (at least) the end of the 1980s, and RJH's long-term research assistant. The GEAD is a voluminous book, consisting of a grammar (pp. 11–346), an extensive trilingual dictionary (pp. 347–862), and two indexes (English: pp. 863–1006, Amharic: pp. 1007–1172). It addresses a scientific audience as well as the Gamo community.

Gamo is spoken by more than one million speakers in southwestern Ethiopia in the Gamo-Gofa Zone whose administrative centre is Arba Mənč. It is a member of the Central Omoto dialect cluster and thus closely related to Wälaytta. Gamo is used nowadays as a medium of instruction in primary schools (grade 1–4) and taught as a subject up to grade 10. Apart from a grammatical pilot sketch by Éva Hompó in 1990 and a PhD thesis on Gamo syntax by Nicholas Taylor in 1994, a few articles have been dedicated to individual grammatical issues and to the politically sensitive question of how far Gamo and the other North Omoto varieties differ from each other. To date, the boundaries and the internal dialectal variation of the lects called 'Gamo' are uncharted terrain and defining them would call, as RJH/EC state, 'for an Omoto-wide research programme involving mutual intelligibility tests across an extensive network of lects displaying varying degrees of divergence over a