_____

JONAS KARLSSON, University of Hamburg

Review

ARCHIE T. WRIGHT, *Basics of Ancient Ethiopic: A Complete Grammar,
Workbook, and Lexicon*, Foreword by LOREN T. STUCKENBRUCK

_____

gether with the numerous other illustrations included in the book, to have a perception of the visual universe of Ethiopian cinema, with its specificity and unique nuances.

With its accessible style, wealth of information, and clearly presented theoretical propositions, this book is suitable for both scholars and students interested in African and global cinema and media studies, Ethiopian studies, and African studies more generally. It can also be a valuable resource to wider audiences interested in the rich, yet little known tradition of cinema that has developed in Ethiopia since the introduction of the first cinema projector in the country during the time of Emperor Menelik II.

Alessandro Jedlowski, Sciences Po Bordeaux

ARCHIE T. WRIGHT, *Basics of Ancient Ethiopic: A Complete Grammar, Workbook, and Lexicon*, Foreword by LOREN T. STUCKENBRUCK, Zondervan Language Basics Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022). xxi, 352 pp. Price: $59.99. ISBN: 978-0-310-53904-9.

Since the number of English-language textbooks of Gəʿəz (Classical Ethiopic) is limited, the appearance of a new one is exciting for teachers and students alike. Archie T. Wright's *Basics of Ancient Ethiopic: A Complete Grammar, Workbook, and Lexicon* opens with a foreword by Loren T. Stuckenbruck and an Acknowledgments section, in which the author explains that this textbook emerged from the recognition that 'the major drawback' of Thomas O. Lambdin's 1978 Gəʿəz primer[1] is its almost exclusive use of transliteration. In contrast, this book aims to 'make accessible the Gəʿəz language in its "original" script', hoping to 'prepare the student to read the Ethiopic manuscripts of the many texts from the Enochic and Jubilees corpuses, among others, found in the Ethiopic manuscript traditions' (p. xix). Indeed, *Basics of Ancient Ethiopic* is primarily aimed at those interested in the Ethiopic versions of biblical and pseudepigraphic texts, as underlined by the frequent comparisons with Biblical Hebrew throughout the book.

The body of *Basics of Ancient Ethiopic* is divided into thirty-eight chapters that offer a progressive introduction to Gəʿəz grammar and vocabulary, with most chapters consisting of three parts: a lesson in grammar, a vocabulary list, and exercises. The book concludes with a lexicon, a series of manuscript images with short descriptions, an appendix consisting of the *Confessio Claudii* (CAe 1252) in Hiob Ludolf's 1691 edition together with an English translation by Ralph Lee,

---

[1] T. O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Classical Ethiopic* (*Geʿez*), Harvard Semitic Studies, 24 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978).

and a minimal bibliography. The 'short reading selections [offering] readers transcriptions […] based on manuscripts' that were announced in Stuckenbruck's foreword are absent. Likewise, the answer key which the reader is invited to consult (p. 78) is accessible via the Zondervan website only to 'approved instructors'—an unfortunate impediment for anyone using this book for self-study.

Despite being written to improve on Lambdin's foundational textbook, among the most salient features of Wright's textbook is its dependence on the predecessor. Admittedly, the imprint page (p. iv) states that 'some exercises [are] adapted' from Lambdin's textbook, but Wright's indebtedness goes far beyond this. To begin with, the exercises in Wright are simply rearranged transcriptions of the exercises in Lambdin: the exercises in Wright's chapter 4 are taken from Lambdin's lesson 9 (exercise C); the exercises in Wright's chapter 5 are taken from Lambdin's lesson 5 (exercises B–C, plus one phrase from Lambdin's lesson 4, exercise B); the exercises in Wright's chapter 6 are taken from Lambdin's lessons 9 (exercise B) and 10 (exercises A and B); and so on.

This rearrangement has sometimes introduced unfortunate problems. In Lambdin's textbook, the exercises of a certain chapter are designed to let the student practice the points of grammar that were discussed in that chapter. In Wright's, however, the exercises do not always match the contents of the chapter. For example, Wright's chapter 9 introduces the reader to adjectives—but the chapter's exercise C is concerned with possessive constructions, some of which are only treated in chapter 12. To a certain degree, the same holds also for the vocabulary lists, which, while seemingly not adopted wholesale from Lambdin, are also not adapted to the exercises. For example, only one single item provided in the vocabulary list in chapter 4 appears (once) in the exercises in the same chapter.

A genuine contribution of Wright is that he incorporates readings from original Gəʿəz sources, which appear irregularly from chapter 3 onwards. These texts, for which no references to editions or manuscripts are cited, are taken from various biblical books, including Enoch and Jubilees. While it is laudable to incorporate authentic Gəʿəz early on—indeed, the focus on constructed sentences is another weakness of Lambdin's textbook—the student is often ill-equipped for these texts. For example, one imagines that it would be difficult for a beginner to work through Genesis 1:1–3, the reading for chapter 3, since it includes jussives and derived verb stems; at this point, the student has not even been introduced to the basic morphology of Gəʿəz nouns and verbs!

Apart from structural problems, a major drawback of Wright's book is frequent typographical and factual errors. A few examples from the vocabulary lists of the first chapters include ዝንቲ (*zənti*, p. 16, for *zəntu*, 'this'), ኵሎ፡ ዕልተ (*kʷəllo ʿəlta* (?), p. 35, for *kʷəllo ʿəlata*, 'every day, all day'); and እኅት (*ʾəḫat*, p. 35, for *ʾəḫət*, 'sister'). On some occasions, it appears that the transposition of Lambdin's transcription into *fidal* has led to errors. For example, while introducing pro-

nunciation and syllabification in chapter 2, the forms 'ዮቀቴሉ፡ *yēqătēlu*' and 'ነበርኬን፡ *năbărkēn*' (p. 14, underlining for stressed syllables removed) are cited, clearly for *yəqattəlu* and *nabarkən*.[2] A quick check of one of Wright's added readings from original Gəʿəz texts (pp. 280–282) reveals at least 25 typographical errors, including ጽብክ (*ṣəbək* (?)*,* for *təsbək*, 'may you preach'), and ጎብይብ (*ḫəbyəb* (?)), for *ḫabeya*, 'with me'). While a certain number of errors is unavoidable, they are especially unfortunate in a book designed for beginners.

Some erroneous forms appear to have started as typographical errors but were subsequently incorporated into Wright's grammatical discussion. For example, in the table for the conjugation of the quadrilateral verb (p. 275), one finds (among several other errors) እመነደብ (*ʾəmanaddab* (?), for the 1cs imperfect *ʾəmanaddəb)*, and እምነድብ (*ʾəməndəb* (?), for the 1cs subjunctive *ʾəmandəb)*. Commenting on these erroneous forms, Wright writes: 'Note in the imperfect 1cs the III consonant has lengthened from the short *ə* vowel to the short *ă* vowel for reasons that are unclear. Possibly due to the እ prefix, but this does not occur in the subjunctive; however, the I consonant shifts from the short *ă* vowel to the short *ə* vowel, again for reasons that are unclear' (p. 276). The reason for both irregularities in the paradigm is simple: they are typographical errors in Wright's own text.

While the use of the Ethiopic script is laudable, it should ideally have been complemented with a Latin transcription to compensate for the inability of the Ethiopic script to mark gemination and to distinguish consonants followed by /ə/ from consonants without a following vowel. Wright treats neither feature with the care that a beginner needs. Admittedly, gemination is occasionally mentioned in the grammatical explanations, but, for example, G stems and D stems are not systematically distinguished in the word lists and the 'Lexicon'.

Many more similar points could be raised, which is a pity, because this book could have served as a useful complement to Lambdin's, had its use of the original Gəʿəz script and incorporation of excerpts from authentic Gəʿəz texts been applied with more care.[3] Thus, while the author is to be commended for his efforts to make the Gəʿəz language more known and read, the manifold problems of this book make it difficult to recommend it unreservedly for the intended audience.

Jonas Karlsson, University of Hamburg

---

[2] Cf. Lambdin 1978, 5, where the very same examples are given but correctly spelt.
[3] In the end, one wonders if it would have been preferable to issue a reworked edition of Lambdin 1978. Following the pattern of the Italian reworking from 2002, one could have kept the transcription in cases where it is of use to the reader, instead of doing away with it completely. See O. Raineri, ed., *Introduzione alla lingua geʿez (etiopico classico)* (Roma: Edizioni 'Orientalia Christiana', 2002).