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NOTE ON BICONSONANTAL AND TRICONSONANTAL ROOTS IN CUSHITIC

We owe to the great Italian Cushitist and Semitist Enrico Cerulli the first general statement about the structure of the root in the Cushitic subdivision of Afro-Asiatic. He made it in his notes published approximately forty years ago¹ and repeated it in 1961. In this later version he says: „La radice di tipo largamente prevalente nel cuscitico è quella: consonante + vocale (stabile) + consonante: e cioè originariamente il cuscitico ha avuto anche radici di tipo trilittero (spacing mine — A. Z.). Questi trilitteri, sporadicamente conservati — a testimonianza degli stadi arcaici della lingua — in alcune parlate, sono stati invece successivamente, e con vari procedimenti fonetici qui di carattere funzionale, assimilati, al tipo preponderante. ... Ora soltanto una ricerca completa nei quattro gruppi del camito-semitico potrà farci presumere in quali casi il punto di partenza sia stato il trilittero od il bilittero, presumendo nel semitico un procedimento di assimilazione al tipo trilittero analogo storicamente a quello che per il bilittero abbiamo visto nel cuscitico”². As a matter of fact, Cerulli's rather estimative statement about the preponderance of the biconsonantal roots concerns only the present situation. He

¹ E. Cerulli, *Le biliterisme en couchitique*, GLECS, 1, 1931—1934, p. 44; idem, *La stabilité de la voyelle radicale en couchitique*, GLECS, 2, 1934—1937, pp. 25—26; idem, *Le trilitéralisme en couchitique*, GLECS, 2, 1934—1937, pp. 85—87; idem, *La racine monosyllabique (C+V ou V seule) en couchitique*, GLECS, 3, 1938, pp. 33—36.

² E. Cerulli, *Etiopico*, in: ed. G. Levi della Vida, *Linguistica semitica: presente e futuro*, Roma 1961, pp. 141—142.

himself points out directly or indirectly that in the past the number of the triconsonantal roots was much bigger.

Yet the general opinion among specialists on Afro-Asiatic is that the Cushitic root was mainly biconsonantal also in the prehistorical stage since they interpret the present situation as the original one. This current opinion has not been actually based on a real investigation of the problem in both synchronic and diachronic aspect. Nevertheless we read for example in Diakonoff's influential book in which Cushitic is represented practically only by Beja that „There are few triconsonantal roots in Cushitic that cannot be explained as borrowed from Semitic”³. It seems that the idea of the biconsonantal Cushitic root has been favored by many linguists because it could be used as an argument in the discussion of the prehistory of the Semitic root. It supported a thesis which has been often questioned until recently that many triconsonantal Semitic roots go back to biconsonantal ones. Cushitic has been compared in this respect with Chadic in which the majority of roots seems to be biconsonantal though we must not forget that no sufficient study of this hypothetical state of Chadic exists so far. Specialists on Chadic fighting for the recognition of Chadic as a true member of Afro-Asiatic family favored this view as well⁴.

³ I. M. Diakonoff, *Semito-Hamitic Languages*, Moscow 1965, p. 37. He argues that „New Semitic languages, even when they have experienced maximum changes in the ancient phonological system, as in Maltese or Neo-Syriac, still preserve triconsonantal roots in most cases. There is no reason to suppose that the same would not hold true of the Cushitic languages had they originally possessed triconsonantal roots in a comparable number”. This parallel is not very satisfactory since it cannot be denied that Cushitic languages differentiated and developed independent of other much earlier than Semitic did.

⁴ A hypothesis about a special relationship between Cushitic and Chadic was formulated at first by J. Lukas in the thirties. Several scholars, including Diakonoff, have taken it for granted. Actually very little has been done so far in order to clarify this problem though we have noticed some very interesting discoveries, e.g. by J. Greenberg. We must know much more about the history and prehistory of both Cushitic and Chadic and so far it is impossible, without a real scrutiny of facts and a reconstruction, to say that Cushitic is more related to

A. B. Dolgopolskiy's *Comparative-Historical Phonetics of Cushitic Languages* marks a mile-stone in the history of Cushitic and of Afro-Asiatic studies in general. It is a pioneer work and certainly it cannot solve all the problems. What has been achieved in a quite difficult state of affairs is, per saldo, a splendid result. More time is necessary for a detailed, objective evaluation. As far as the problem of the root is concerned, it provides a basis for a more objective though certainly not conclusive statement. In the list of the reconstructed roots⁵ I have found:

- 355 biconsonantal roots of which a fair number has been hypothetically reconstructed as roots with geminated second consonant
- 101 other geminated roots
- 339 triconsonantal roots
- 33 quadriconsonantal roots⁶
- 6 reduplicated roots

Even if some of the reconstructions are questioned by some scholars and even if, perhaps, some of them have no really Proto-Cushitic status being e.g. only Proto-Agaw or Proto-Lowland Cushitic etc., we shall have to change the current opinion about the preponderance of the biliteral roots in Cushitic. Even if there is such a preponderance (what we know about it in the present stage is only estimative), it was not so great in the past. Since the overall number of the reconstructed roots is quite small from a statistical point of view (though, obviously, quite well significant for comparative-historical purposes), I do not think that we may be sure that the relation 355:339 or 461:339 (if we include all the geminated roots) is really significant in absolute terms in favor of the biconsonantal roots. What we may rather safely assume is that Proto-Cushitic had both trilateral and biconsonantal roots and that it is impossible to say now (i.e. further research is needed)

Chadic than to other Afro-Asiatic subdivisions. Certainly a verification of this hypothesis is one of the most important tasks within Afro-Asiatic studies.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 375—388.

⁶ Many of them are names of animals and words denoting parts of human body.

what their exact relation really was. Any aprioric assumption that biconsonantal roots must be older and that triconsonantal ones must be younger is not really scientific. Even this „biconsonantal and triconsonantal” Cushitic root hypothesis may be well used in support of the thesis that Proto-Semitic possessed a much bigger number of biconsonantal roots so that the triconsonantal roots did not constitute such an overwhelming majority.

As the above-mentioned objection is not conclusive, I have found:

353. Biconsonantal roots of which a fair number has been hypothetically reconstructed as roots with generated

second consonant

107. Other biconsonantal roots

330. Triconsonantal roots

32. Quadriconsonantal roots

8. Polysyllabic roots

Given the state of the reconstructions are questioned by some scholars and even if, perhaps, some of them have no really Proto-Cushitic status being only Proto-Araw or Proto-Bantu. Cushitic etc. we shall have to change the current opinion about the predominance of the biconsonantal roots in Cushitic. Even if there is such a predominance (what we know about it in the present stage is only estimative), it was not so great in the past. Since the overall number of the reconstructed roots is quite small from a statistical point of view (though, obviously, quite well significant for comparative-historical purposes), I do not think that we may be sure that the relation 353:330 or 481:330 (if we include all the generated roots) is really significant in absolute terms in favor of the biconsonantal roots. What we may rather safely assume is that Proto-Cushitic had both biconsonantal and triconsonantal roots and that it is impossible to say now (i.e. further research is needed).

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EDWARD LIPIŃSKI

ARCHAEOLOGY OF PALESTINE *

A monumental *Archaeology of Palestine* has been realized in Polish by a team of twenty-two authors. They have presented this volume to a great Polish scholar and archaeologist, Prof. Kazimierz Michałowski, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. Thus, after W. F. Albright's preface and L. Stefaniak's words of introduction, Barbara Gąsowska has outlined Prof. Michałowski's scholarly activity and achievements (pp. 11—19). His photograph adorns the first page of the book.

The bulk of the volume constitutes a kind of academic textbook of Palestinology. It is divided in four main parts: an introduction, a description of the Palestinian civilizations from palaeolithic times to the Mamluk domination, an outline of Palestinian technics and arts up to Vespasian's reign, a view of the religious institutions of ancient Palestine. It is rather surprising for the two last parts of the volume not to cover the same period as the second part.

I. INTRODUCTION

L. Stefaniak has written the introductory chapter of part one (pp. 23—46). This author largely follows chap. II of Albright's *Archaeology of Palestine*. The chapter's aim was to give a historical

* Review article of *Archeologia Palestyny*, edited by L. W. Stefaniak, Poznań, Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1973. In-8°, 1076 pages, out of which pp. 883—1055 with illustrations and maps. 190 fig. in the text. Price: zł 390.