

Review articles

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SOME COMMENTS ON A NEW MANUAL OF SEMITIC LANGUAGES

Writing a treatise on Comparative Semitics is no easy task on account of the wide scope of the subject, including several language subgroups most of them integrated by more than a few languages and many dialects, of which only a handful have survived until today, therefore requiring to rely exclusively on written records of at times insecure interpretation. The last successful attempt to carry out this task singlehandedly was that of C. Brockelmann's *Grundriß der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen*,¹ a book still offering the best available array of comparative data on this realm one century after its issuing, although at times unjustly disregarded by some younger generations of Semitic scholars who have sought new ways and not always better methods for handling this subject. Needless to say, such an approach is totally legitimate and unavoidable, when due consideration is paid to advances in both theoretical and applied linguistics, although there has been, in our view, occasional hurry in the conclusions drawn from some of the research conducted, by not using all the existing evidences and occasionally falling prey to a certain fondness of novelty and leading roles, which has led some people to put the cart before the horse, i.e., the bad habit of first bringing forth hypotheses, and next looking for the arguments to support them, exactly the reverse of sound research, which should discover facts and their connections and only then put them together in a hypothetical explanation.

Another problem in the collective works which have dealt with Comparative Semitics through the 20th c. has been the selection of the collaborators, which involves not only the right choice of the right persons, both knowledgeable in their fields and capable of doing team work, but also the socio-political

¹ Berlin 1908, rep. by G. Olms. Hildesheim, 1966, 2 vols.

difficulty of putting together a viable team, without raising susceptibilities or enhancing hegemonies. Moscati, Spitaler, Ullendorf and von Soden managed to successfully tackle both issues in their collegiate *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages*,² but such a near miracle has not been repeated in other attempts at the same goal during the last century, perhaps because the juxtaposition of chapters authored by separate scholars has not turned out to be the best way to induce moderated interaction while, on the other hand, single authorship has not proven totally effective in the present circumstances.

Such is the predicament, we would say, of the newly appeared manual, *The Semitic Languages. An International Handbook*,³ edited by S. Weninger in collaboration with G. Khan, M.P. Streck and Janet Watson and including contributions by also G. Takács, V. Brugnatelli, H. Ekkehard Wolff, D.L. Appleyard, L. Kogan, J. Huehnergard, A. Rubin, O.D. Gensler, M. Waltisberg, B. Kouwenberg, G. Zólymi, W.H. von Soldt, H. Gzella, D. Pardee, W. Röllig, L. Edzard, M. Bar-Asher, O. Schwarzwald, A. Sáenz-Badillos, Y. Reshef, F. Mario Fales, Margaretha Folmer, M. Sokoloff, A. Tal, M. Morgenstern, J.F. Healy, Françoise Briquel Chatonnet, B. Burtea, W. Arnold, O. Jastrow, Ch.G. Häberl, Olga Kapeliuk, Hani Hayajneh, J. Retsö, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, D. Glass, Karin C. Ryding, Sh. Talay, Samia Naïm, C. Pereira, J. Owens, Catherine Miller, X. Luffin, M. Tilmatine, D. Gazsi, A. Borg, P. Stein, Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle, D. Morin, R. Voigt, R. Meyer, E. Wagner and J. Crass, whose credentials for being put in charge of the manifold tasks encompassed by this volume are more obvious in some cases than in others, perhaps because the ideal persons to select in each case could not find the time and yen for a job not necessarily attractive to every scholar.

This much said and acknowledging above all that this volume will be indeed quite useful to every person interested in Comparative Semitics and Linguistics, and that some of its chapters are magisterial, the fact remains that, as in every human work, it has some flaws which a reviewer must point out, at the risk of exposing his own unavoidable ignorance in much of the subject matter, in the aim of having them spotted, discussed and corrected if need be in future editions of the same work, or avoided in similar treatises that might be produced. So, let us call a spade a spade for the benefit of true scholarship.

We should perhaps begin by remembering that scholars majoring in some particular areas of Semitic studies naturally tend to over-emphasize the role played by “their” major language in the interplay of the whole family. The first generations of scholars in Comparative Semitics were soon accused of turning Arabic into “a kind of normative grammar of the Semitic languages” (see

² Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1964.

³ De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin – Boston, 2011.

p. 152, in the chapter on “Reconstructive Morphology”, by S. Weninger who does not share that pronouncement by Kienast): however, the acknowledgment of the relative truth of that trend during the 19th c. and part of the 20th, must be matched with the avowal of the fact that the ensuing reaction tipping the scales in favour of East Semitic was also flawed by some lack of even-handedness. For the fact remains that the statistical overwhelming majority of Arabic data over the total body of Semitic cannot be taken, in a kind of “positive discrimination”, as an excuse to minimize their impact on comparative reflexions on this subject or, which is becoming customary among our some of our colleagues, in order to simplify the task of handling and processing that flood of information, by simply ignoring anything not reported in the two or three most used Western grammars of Classical Arabic. This has the same disastrous effects on a survey of Comparative Semitic as could be expected from a treatment of Indo-European linguistics in which Greek would be represented by data from the single Attic dialect, which no serious linguist has ever done, to the best of our recollections.

As a consequence of disregard or low competence in the whole large and indivisible field of Arabic, one comes across certain statements, like that of Weninger’s on p. 155, admitting *šarq-awsaṭī* “middle-eastern” as acceptable Modern Standard Arabic, when in fact only the press of certain countries and innovative word-makers out of touch with the mainstream of Arabic good taste would admit such an eye-sore, while other examples of word-composition suitable for his purpose are available even in Classical Arabic, like *ḥamdalah* “saying ‘Praise to God’” or *mālī* “my property” < *mā lī* “what I have”.⁴ This applies also to his statement on p. 159, “Cl. Arab has an *a*-vowel in the prefixes of the G-stem, while most other languages have *i* or reflexes thereof”, which is true except in the case of *iḥālu* “I think”, but suggests to the uninformed reader that such is the case for the whole Arabic realm, while the truth is, contrariwise, that Neo-Arabic only has *a*- when followed by pharyngeal or laryngeal consonants,⁵ or on p. 164 when he states that “the derivational plural (with but few exceptions) is only used for masculine nouns”, thereby implying that most feminine nouns would not have broken plurals, an obvious mistake easy to check against dictionaries, or in the same page, when he still gives some credibility to the interpretation of Hebrew *mālākīm* as an internal plural “with a pleonastic plural ending”,⁶ or on p. 165, where he states that “the fact that

⁴ Also more acceptable would be the example on p. 287, in the chapter on Morphological Typology of Semitic, by O. Gensler, *rās-mālī* “capitalist”, a case of the phenomenon called *naḥt* by native Arabic grammarians, which enjoys a moderate degree of acceptability in Standard Arabic.

⁵ This misinformation is not corrected on p. 271, in which the effects of Barth’s law (why Barth-Ginsberg, by the way? Barth, Philippi and Geer need no company in the phonetic laws attributed to their names) are restricted to “a few old Arabic forms”.

⁶ The same mistaken assumption, curiously enough already accepted by Brockelmann, *Grundriß* I 430, is repeated here on p. 272, in Huhnegard and Rubin’s chapter “Phyla and Waves:

internal plurals do not occur in Akk. make it hard to believe that they are a PS phenomenon ... A possible solution for these conflicting isoglosses is to assume that the internal plural is a secondary feature that spread by areal diffusion",⁷ no less surprising than his acceptance of a PS 'ad "until, to", which ignores Hebrew 'ad and its cognates in many Semitic tongues,⁸ or again by the same contributor, the statements on p. 752 in the chapter on "Aramaic-Arabic contact" about would-be influences of Aramaic spellings on Arabic, not necessarily proven.⁹

Models of Classification of the Semitic Languages". We dealt with this issue in our *Problemática de la pluralidad en semítico. El plural fracto*, Madrid, CSIC, 1971, pp. 116-8, only to conclude that, in fact, and in spite of some very rare instances of irregular plurals in North Semitic, there is no reason to believe that the "segholated" nouns of Hebrew follow in this instance other model than that of *dābār*, pl. *dābārīm*, from which their singular is not different once it has acquired a bi-syllabic shape. The parallel cases in Arabic of most regular fem. and some masc. pls., like *ẓulmah* ~ *ẓula/umāt* "darkness", *sidrah* ~ *sidarāt* "lote-tree", *arḍ* ~ *araḍūn* "earth", etc., should suffice to recognize in them all mere instances of prosodically conditioned *svarabhakti*, i.e., pre-tonic parasitical vowels, comparable to modern cases like Egyptian Arabic *balakūna*, from Italian *balcone*. On p. 439, in the chapter "Northwest Semitic in General", H. Gzella deals again with this issue and is inclined to accept those cases of broken plurals in NWS, together with other residual items, and quotes J. Blau's opinion, contrary to the "Central Semitic" hypothesis, as the knowledgeable Arabist he is. L. Edzard is wiser on p. 490, in the chapter "Biblical Hebrew", when he deals with those plurals as cases of "internal phonological alternations or intraflexion", considering both solutions at least if, as one can suspect, this "intraflexion" means "internal flexion", i.e., a broken plural.

⁷ Which is incompatible with their presence across Afroasiatic; see J. Greenberg, "Internal a-plurals in Afroasiatic (Hamito-Semitic)", in *Afrikanistische Studien Fetscher-Westermann*, 1955, 198/204, and our *Problemática*, p. 70, fn. 27. The same attitude is repeated on p. 273, in the chapter on "Phyla and Waves: Models of Classification of the Semitic Languages", eagerly declaring that "in all modern Ethiopian Semitic languages external plurals are the norm", only to next half-correct that statement by saying that "numerous internal plurals survive in some languages, like Tigrinya", but totally forgetting the case of Tigre (to which Palmer consecrated an important chapter in *The Morphology of the Tigre Noun*, London, Oxford UP, 1962), which proves that only Southern Ethiopian has forsaken broken plurals, except as borrowings. Broken plurals cannot be explained away as "an areal feature" as they are so well developed in other members of the Afroasiatic phylum, like Berber, in which the infix {-a-} plays the same central role as in traditional South Semitic, and must be acknowledged as a characteristic retention of this subgroup, i.e., Arabic, Modern and Old South Arabian and Ethiopic, thus doing away with the very concept of the "Central Semitic" hypothesis.

⁸ E.g., in F. Brown, S. R. Driver & C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1907 and successive eds., p. 723, or in W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Gə'əz*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1987, p. 56.

⁹ Thus, e.g., he apparently ignores that the second vowel of Arabic *ana* "I" is anceps, so that its *alif* has not to be considered as a reflex of Aramaic, and he explains the Qur'ānic spelling >šlwh< "prayer" in the same manner, which would have then spread to >nḡwh< "deliverance", but he omits other similar cases like >hywh< "life", >zkwh< "alms tax", >rbw< "usury" and >mškwh< "niche for a lamp", which must be construed as proving that *alif* was in such cases rather a peculiar device to convey a *Ḥiḡāzī* allophone, or even perhaps phoneme, allowing no palatalization on account of descending from foreign or native /aw/, /u/ or /o/, i.e., Aramaic *šəlōtā*

The same criticism would apply to the statement on p. 286, in the chapter on “Morphological Typology of Semitic”, in which O. Gensler describes the Arabic broken plurals *a’yun* and *’uyūn* as semantically differentiated for the meanings of “eye” and “spring”, which is inaccurate, because while it is true that the first item cannot be used in the second meaning, both are possible for “eye”, as plurals of paucity and abundance, respectively,¹⁰ or to the statement on p. 287 by the same contributor to the effect that “Semitic languages can easily borrow foreign noun ‘as is’, without rearranging their vowelings to fit into an acceptable native pattern”, which is the case of Modern Hebrew, but not by any means of Standard Arabic, or even Neo-Arabic.¹¹ A certain neglect of Arabic data is found again on p. 290 of that same contribution when, speaking about the lack of distinction between alienable and non-alienable possessive forms, its common presence in Neo-Arabic dialects is forgotten¹² and next, when mentioning the absence in Old Semitic of morphological distinction of politeness, vs. its secondary development in modern Ethiosemitic, the parallel case of Modern Standard Arabic is again ignored. The same superficial acquaintance with Arabic grammar is reflected again on p. 296, where the elative is defined as particular to adjectives, when in fact it is often obtained from verbs in Old Arabic¹³ and, a few lines below, when he opts for “tense” instead of “aspect”, and for “perfect” and “imperfect”

and *zəkūtā*, and Ethiopic *māškot*, but also thoroughly native *ḥayāh*, *naḡāt* and *ribā* from roots ending with /w/. Neither is the case of *>mā’h<* “one hundred” to be simply dismissed as reflecting Aramaic *>m’(<)<*, in spite of Diem’s enlightening paper on this Qur’ānic spelling: chances are that an old spelling *>m’t<* for *mi’at* has been pseudo-corrected by adding the newly devised marker “with a seat” of the phoneme *hamz*, which has left its former grapheme *alif* without a function, tough retained in the script, because the editors of the Sacred Book could add, but not suppress anything.

¹⁰ Some scholars of the good old days used to say that “German is the first Semitic language”, meaning that it was difficult to acquire a good command of this discipline without the ability to at least read it, on account of the huge and indispensable two-century old production of German speaking scholars in this realm. To that still valid assertion, we would add “and next, Arabic”, for the reasons above outlined and ignored at their own risk by some Semitic scholars of our days.

¹¹ As proven by cases like medieval and modern *iflātūnī* “platonic” and *falsafah* “philosophy”, medieval *iksīr* “elixir” from Greek *xērā*, modern *talfazah* “TV” and *tilfāz* “TV set” instead of *tilfīzyūn*. Even in modern dialects, the trend to full-fledged Arabicization is felt in cases like Moroccan *tərsida* “electricity” < Spanish *electricidad*, and *ksida* “accident”, < French *accident*, with painstaking adoption of the Arabic patterns { *taf’īlah* } and { *fa’īlah* }. At times, this trend appears stronger in some Arab countries than in others, cf. Egyptian *mubayl* “cell-phone” vs. Syrian *ḥalawī*, Arabian *ḡawwāl*, Egyptian *kanbiyūtar* “computer” vs. *ḥāsūb* in Tunisia and other countries, etc.

¹² Cf. *ummī* “my mother” everywhere, but *ilkitāb bitā’i / dyālī / tibā’i / ḥaggī* “my house”, etc. in the various Neo-Arabic dialects.

¹³ In which sentences like *ana aktabu minka* “I write more (or better) than you” are not uncommon.

“for convenience”, against the most established Semitic scholars’ conviction that aspect and the matching dichotomy “perfective” vs. “imperfective” do constitute the original and main yield of the Semitic conjugation.¹⁴

This partial neglect of Arabic data reappears on p. 310, in the chapter on “Syntactic Typology of Semitic”, by M. Waltisberg, upon dealing with the ordering of complex numbers and omitting the Arabic solutions, which has evolved in a curious manner from the strict reverse order of Sabaic towards the standard Modern Arabic solution, which is the usual and most widespread in Semitic from higher to lower, except in the case of tens and units. Again a syntactical mistake is incurred in by this author on p. 312, when he says that “a noun as a predicative is generally marked with nominative ... but accusative is, though rarely, possible”, which he exemplifies with *a-ḥaqqan mā taqūlu* “Is what you say truth?”, where that theoretic accusative is, in fact, an adverb and as such the equivalent of a marginal phrase, scarcely different from *a-ḥi ḡiddin mā taqūlu* “Are you speaking in earnest?”.¹⁵ In the front page, an excellent occasion has been missed to notice that the marking of the predicative with accusative in both Arabic after *kāna* and Gəʿaz after *konä* is an important shared innovation supporting the traditional classification of the South Semitic sub-branch.¹⁶

Thus, for instance, in the chapter on “Proto-Semitic Phonetics and Phonology” (p. 60), upon listing the different realizations of emphatics in Arabic, our good friend and colleague L. Kogan omits the glottalized /t/ of Upper Egypt,¹⁷ particularly important as a witness of the South Arabian descent of a sizable segment of the Arab conquerors who settled in Egypt, before spreading thence towards the West, and of the narrow and unassailable unity of Southern Semitic (= Arabic, modern and ancient South Arabian and Ethiopic). Misunderstanding of some Arabic sentences does happen also in some sections, e.g., on p. 322, in the chapter on “Syntactic Typology of Semitic”, by M. Waltisberg, where *fa-* is not

¹⁴ This may not be the case of Modern Hebrew, Modern Aramaic and Modern Ethiosemitic, for centuries under non-Semitic influences, but it is strictly preserved even in Modern Standard Arabic, when the perfective is necessarily required in a sentence like *ini ḥtaramtanī ḥtaramtuka* “if you respect me, I shall respect you”, in which the envisaged actions are future and in no way perfect, but the perfective is the appropriate means for expressing that the condition must be completely fulfilled in order to produce its future effect, together with the completeness of the latter, if that complete fulfillment happens. Such grammatical behavior, characteristic of Old Semitic languages, can only be called “aspect” and not “tense”, which is not convenient at all.

¹⁵ However, there are two cases of otherwise unexplained accusative predicates, namely in negative sentences with the *Ḥiḡāzī mā* and in predicates excepted with *illā*.

¹⁶ We have recently authored a paper on the subject of “Lexicostatistics and the Central Semitic Theory”, in *Aula Orientalis-Supplementa (Studies Presented to Joaquín Sanmartín)* 22 (2006) 139-144, fn. 12, in which this issue is dealt with.

¹⁷ Ignored again on p. 269, upon dealing with pharyngealization of emphatic consonants, although it was already described by M. Woidich in his contribution to the *Handbuch der arabischen Dialekte* (eds. W.D. Fischer & O. Jastrow), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1980, p. 209.

introducing “the matrix clause after preposed dependant clauses”, as he fancies, because *law qadimtu lmadīnata fanāzartu mā yaqūlu muḥammadun* does not mean “if only I came to Medina then I would hear what Muhammad says”, because *law* has here an optative value, i.e., “why should I not go to Medina so that I would see what M. says?”, i.e., *fa-* is here a mere copulative conjunction, though expressing the order of actions; otherwise, the required conjunction for the apodosis of such a conditional clause would have been *la-*, and the meaning would have become quite different, i.e., “if I had arrived to Medina, I would have seen what M. says”. This inaccuracy happens again on p. 323, where *walaqad ra’aytunī yawma ‘idīn altaqītu talātata adru’in* cannot be rendered as “I was then present and collected three breast-plates”, but as “I think that I collected three breast-plates that day”.

At the risk of sounding like a nit-picker on matters related with Arabic, we still find some shortcomings on p. 792, in the chapter on “Clasical Arabic” by J. Retsö, where the length of the vowels in the suffixes *-hū/ī* is omitted, as well as the *anceps* quality of the second vowel of *ana* “I”, while he next states that the dual of the demonstrative pronouns is rarely used, against the frequent use of anybody, Arab or Arabist, who writes in Standard Arabic and has to mention “these two books”. Again on p. 792, his lists of noun templates are misleading because their vowels are not random as the symbol V would suggest; neither can one understand why he says that the patterns $t'VC_1C_2VC_3$ are “rare in Arabic”, above all, the second one, which provides hundreds of adjectives of colour and physical qualities. No less distorting of the basic morphological facts is his attempt in pp. 792-94 at describing the noun flexion by departing from the traditional analysis and introducing the concept of three states which do not clarify, but rather complicate the understanding of the basic categories of case, determination and diptosis, together with some mistakes like saying that in the case of adjectives like *aḥmar / ḥamra' / ḥumr* “red” even non-human plurals should have the adjective $C_1uC_2C_3$.¹⁸ Neither is true that broken plurals (p. 795) be “in most cases unpredictable”,¹⁹ nor can we agree with his description on p. 796 of the verb in the Arabiyya as having “two main tenses, traditionally

¹⁸ Curiously enough the same mistake appears in W. Fischer’s excellent *Grammatik des klassischen Arabisch*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1972, p. 66, possibly induced by the usage in Arabic poetry and the Qur’ān of the pl. fem. agreement in such cases and with any kind of adjectives, but Arab writers of every age have used *buyūtun ḥamrā’* “red houses” most of the time. This applies also to p. 800, where *alquṣūru lḥumru* “the red castles” is not the usual idiom of Standard Arabic, which is *alquṣūru lḥamrā’*. No less striking in this connection and paragraph is the mention of merely Neo-Arabic *ta’bān* “tired” next to Classical and Standard *sakrān* “drunk” and the lack of distinction of cases in which the suffix *{-ān}* generates diptotic or triptotic adjectives.

¹⁹ This issue was studied by A. Murtonen, *Broken Plurals. Origin and development of the System*, Leiden, Brill, 1964, and by us, in our *Problemática*, pp. 83-86, there being entire semantic categories (like some types of adjectives) and morphological structures, such as quadri-consonantic bases, with almost totally predictable plural shapes.

called perfect and imperfect”,²⁰ or with his statement to the effect that “base IV is an anomaly in possessing what looks like two different bases for the two tenses. The imperfect is usually explained by deletion of the prefix *’a-*, an explanation which can be questioned”: in fact, there is no reason to question that deletion, with many parallels in Old Arabic and Neo-Arabic,²¹ and there can hardly be any talk of different bases, as the vowel alternation in base IV is not different from the case of every other four or five consonant verbal templates, i.e., VII, VIII, IX-XI, X, etc., opposing the thematic vowel /a/ of the perfective aspect to the /i/ of the imperfective. Again, on p. 799, in the realm of syntax, when he says that “the predicate may also consist of a clause”, this statement is equally valid for the subject, e.g., *an taskuta ḥasanun* “your being silent is good”, no less correct than *arra’yu an taskuta* “the right thing to do is your being silent”. It strikes again that he include under the heading of predication, on p. 802, two sentences like *antumū lmu’minīna* “you, as believers”, and *ḡādara aqrānahu amwātan* “he left his opponents dead”, the first one being a case of *iḥtiṣās*, i.e., a modal complement of specification, and the second instance, one of double object, neither of them being at all a predicate, although some linguists would speak of “predicative” in the second instance. He should also have reconsidered statements like the one in pp. 803-4, “Contrary to what is often claimed the Arabiyya knows the agent extension-phrase”, with an example like **ulqiyati lmu’āḥaḍaratu min qibali l’ustād* “the lecture was delivered by the professor”, which can indeed be found in very poor journalistic Arabic, but will not be incurred in by any Arabic speaker or writer with some measure of good taste and concern for an acceptable style; as for a sentence like **ruqiṣat fi lmasā’i* “there was dancing in the evening”, it is simply ungrammatical, and it is not true that “a finite verb preceding a not yet mentioned subject as a rule has the 3rd person masc. sing. form”, since gender agreement is the rule in such case both in old and modern Standard Arabic. On p. 806, the Arabic scholar is again stricken by the statement to the effect that

²⁰ His defence of that stand on p. 803 with the argument that medieval Arab grammarians were “temporalists” is just a mix-up of technical terms with the concepts underlying them: they simply called the perfective *māḍī* because it denotes the past most of the time, but their label for the imperfective, *almuḍāri’* “the imitating one” made also perfectly clear that, being capable of denoting any tense, its basic meaning was not such. Otherwise, they were quite aware of the non-perfect meaning of the *māḍī*, e.g., in conditional and optative contexts: we could say that they simply did not find the term to express “aspect”, as they had not either in the case of “phoneme”, which they kept calling “letter”, which by the way happened in Western grammars until rather recent times.

²¹ Occasional elision of *hamz* in Old Arabic is not only a poetic license, about which see W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP 1967, p. 374-378, but was also a common feature of many Old Arabic dialects, including those of Qurayṣ: see our paper “From Old Arabic to Classical Arabic through the pre-Islamic koiné: some notes on the native grammarians’ sources, attitudes and goals”, in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 21 (1976) 62-98, p. 74, fn. 1, about *hamz* and *taḥyīn*.

“Arabic thus does not possess proper relative pronouns”, apparently triggered only by the fact that it is not used with an indefinite antecedent, very much like in English “this is the man I talked to you about”, a mere case of optional deletion from the surface structure of an unnecessary marker.

Insufficient acquaintance with Neo-Arabic dialects and their features may account for some hurried analyses of certain phenomena like the absence of elision of *hamzatu lwaṣl* on p. 827, in the chapter on “Middle Arabic” by G. Khan, where *ft alḥikmih* “in wisdom” is likely to reflect a hypercorrection for **falḥikma* in Andalusī Arabic or generally speaking, dialects under South Arabian influence,²² as well as in *qad ankasar qalbī* “my heart has been broken” (for Standard Arabic *qadi nkasar*). On a different account, we must also take exception to our colleague’s analysis of >*aljawār*< as an instance of “shortening of a long vowel in an unstressed syllable”, as it appears that the final long vowel, already optional in the pausal forms of Old Arabic, has been entirely dropped in this case in some Neo-Arabic dialects, like Andalusī Arabic, as reflected in the lexica of this dialect; likewise, the use of *illad/ḏī* in all contexts does not reflect Classical Arabic any longer, but is simply a feature of Early Neo-Arabic, and the conversion of Hebrew /š/ into /s/ (p. 829) is a well-known feature of Judaeo-Arabic.²³ Otherwise, one cannot be but utterly surprised by a statement like the one issued by no less a knowledgeable Arabic dialectologist than Janet Watson, on p. 858, in the chapter on “Arabic Dialects”, affirming that “essentially, the colloquial and the literary language of the Arab tribes, both before the conquest and for a long time afterward, were identical”, which runs against what native grammarians kept telling us, as well as by her hypothesis of cognation between Maltese *sa* and Classical Arabic *ḥattā* as a future prefix.²⁴ Also on p. 950, in the chapter on “Dialects of Egypt and Sudan” by J. Dickens, the reader should have been apprised of the fact that the š-root prefix, as in *ša’lab* “to overturn”, is no longer productive, or, on p. 1027, in the chapter on “Language Contact between Arabic and Modern European Languages” by L. Edzard, only sheer ignorance of Arabic dialectology can explain the innovative, but acrobatic and mistaken derivation of English *magazine* and French *magasin* “from Arabic *maḥāzin*,

²² See on this particular issue our paper “South Arabian features in Andalusī Arabic”, in *Studia linguistica et orientalia memoriae Haim Banc dedicata*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1989, 94-103.

²³ See the most recent work by S. Lévy, *Parlers arabes des Juifs du Maroc. Histoire, sociolinguistique et géographie dialectale*, Saragossa, Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Oriente Próximo, 2009 (recently disappeared through the agency of a conspiracy of dunces), p. 189.

²⁴ As in the case of its Andalusī Arabic match, this item does not seem to reflect Old Arabic *sa-*, but an abbreviation of Neo-Arabic *assā’ah* “now”, see our *A grammatical sketch of the Spanish Arabic dialect bundle*, Madrid, IHAC, 1977, p. 129.

plural of *maḥzan* ‘storehouse’, instead of the traditionally accepted and correct singular.²⁵

References to “Central Semitic” deserve special mention and discussion, especially since Huhnergard and Rubin on p. 261, in the chapter “Phyla and Waves: Models of Classification of the Semitic Languages”, pronounce that “Hetzron’s model remains foundational, and is the point of departure for additional investigation”, thus disregarding its rejection by quite a few very knowledgeable Semitic scholars who have either refused to comment on this novelty or rejected that outlay by providing substantial evidence against it.²⁶ The same may apply to the section on “*yaqtulu* and the TMA (= time, mood and aspect) system” on p. 271 of the same chapter, where the author asserts that “one look in vain for any vestiges of the old *yaqattal* form in any of the Central Semitic languages”, which has been invalidated by our paper of 2006.²⁷ On p. 35, within the chapter on “Semitic-Chadic Relations”, by H. Ekkehard Wolff, some weight is given to Alice Faber’s mention of Arabic *bal* “on the contrary” as a cognate of the supposed Afro-Asiatic negative marker **b*, which we showed was rather unlikely. At times, however, the traditional and correct subdivision of Semitic reappears, e.g., on p. 23 of the chapter on “Semitic-Berber Relations” by V. Brugnatelli, /f/ instead of **p*/ is considered as “an isogloss typical of Southern Semitic (Arabic, modern and ancient South Arabian, Ethiopian)”,²⁸ or on p. 264, when Huhnergard affirms that “the L-stem, along with the other two features discussed above (i.e., the fricative /f/ and broken plurals) favours the existence of a South Semitic sub-family”.²⁹ Attempts at passing off certain forms as witnesses of false equations, just in order to prop the weak “Central Semitic” hypothesis,

²⁵ Apparently ignoring Spanish *almacén* and Portuguese *armazém* and considering that the second vowel in English and French, as well as in Catalan *magatzem*, through which probably this item reached northernmost latitudes, required a better explanation, like the one offered by that plural. However, that vowel was a mere makeshift device meant to reflect the velar consonant /ħ/, omitted by Spanish and Portuguese, both of which would have retained the stress on the second syllable if the etymon had been Andalusí Arabic *maḥāzin*.

²⁶ See our article “On the degree of kinship between Arabic and Northwest Semitic”, in *AIDA 5th Conference Proceedings*, Cadix, 2002, 187-194, with a one by one refutation of Alice Faber’s arguments in favour of the “Central Semitic” hypothesis.

²⁷ “Geminate imperfections in Arabic masked as intensive stems of the verb”, in *Estudios de Dialectología Norteafricana y Andalusí* 8 (2004) [2006] 33/57.

²⁸ Not so in our opinion, expressed in our aforementioned article “On the degree of kinship...”, p. 189.

²⁹ Apparently, there are some doubts about the cogency of the fad contained in the “Central Semitic” hypothesis in the back of the minds of its smarter supporters, like Huhnergard, who is clearly aware of the “problems with Hetzron’s model” (sic on p. 263), and has heard our arguments against it in some meetings, which is perhaps the reason why he says on p. 267 that “there are innovations which support the idea that Central Semitic is a genetic family, areal phenomena that stem from the fact that Central Semitic languages had prolonged contact subsequent to their split from each other, and areal phenomena that support a South Semitic linguistic area”.

must equally be rejected, like on p. 157, the attribution of Hebrew *pōlel* to L-stems.³⁰ Generally speaking, the proponents of that groundless hypothesis not only look desperately for arguments in favour of that unlikely interpretation of Semitic classification, but also systematically disregard any item supporting the classical “Brockelmannian” outlay and thus, e.g., on p. 245, it is remarkable that Arabic *wahaba* “to give” has been omitted as a lexical retention connecting this language with Ethiopic, while for the typical *bəzuḥ* “many” of this language there is no mention of its Arabic cognate *baḍaḥ* “luxury”, and the same applies to the substitution of *kəl’e* “two” in Gə’əz for the standard Pan-Semitic numeral, about which see more below.

As it could be expected, the inclusion of both old and modern South Arabian in the “Central Semitic subgroup”, forced by the undeniable kinship of the former with North Arabian, has had strange consequences on the so-called “Ethiosemitic languages”, e.g., in the chapter “Ethiosemitic in General”, by S. Weninger, such as denying its descent from the language of the Sabaean settlers, by simply ignoring historical facts and dogmatically affirming that “ES was therefore an independent subgroup of Semitic already present in Ethiopia when the South Arabian colonists brought their language and culture to Ethiopia ... arisen from a much earlier wave of immigration ... the principle of archaic heterogeneity that the Ethiopian region is the origin of Semitic should be considered”. Next, while trying to provide at least a few grammatical features that “can be interpreted as shared innovations setting this group apart from the Semitic languages of South-West Asia”, we get across the same kind of weak arguments put forward for the whole “Central Semitic” hypothesis, namely, 1) the agent noun with the pattern CāCaCi, 2) the existential verb **hlw*, and 3) the ending of the infinitive *-ot, of which number one is the mere result of attaching the *nisbah* suffix to pan-Semitic CaCCāC,³¹ number two has left some important traces in Standard Arabic,³² and

³⁰ The cases mentioned by Brockelmann, *Grundriß* I 513, *məšōfet* “Wiedersacher”, *yəšō’er* “er verweht” and *məlōšen* “Verleumder” are indeed valid examples of L-stems, but also, as the author said, merely “isolated remnants”. But one should avoid the interpretation as L-stems of Hebrew hollow verbs of D-stems with that appearance, like *qōmēm*, which H. Gzella mentions on p. 445 of his contribution “Northwest Semitic in General”, because there is no semantic connection with a true L-stem in such cases, and chances are that we are in front of what F. Rundgren in his book *Intensive und Aspekt-Korrelation Studien zur äthiopischen und akkadischen Verbalstammbildung*, Uppsala, Wiesbaden, Lundequista, 1959, called “re-utilization” of an abandoned morpheme.

³¹ We detected some cases of this pattern in Andalusi Arabic, attributable to its Yemenite ingredients, see “Southarabian features in Andalusi Arabic” in *Studia linguistica et orientali memoriae Haim Blanc dicata*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1989, 94-103, esp. 99-100.

³² Like the interrogative marker *hal* and other items mentioned in our paper “Ethiopic *hallāwā* ‘to be’ and its Arabic Cognates. Some Thoughts on the Close Ties between Rhetorical Interrogation, Emphatic Affirmation and Negation”, in *Dialectology of the Semitic Languages. Proceeding of the IV Meeting on Comparative Semitics. Zaragoza 06/9-11/2010*, Sabadell-Barcelona, AUSA, 2012, 1-4. It is characteristic of some of the contributions to this volume to deal

number three is nothing but a peculiar combination of the two Proto-Semitic abstract markers $\{-ū\}$ and $\{-t\}$. This desperate attempt at giving a mere fad the appearance of a solid scientific discovery reaches the paradoxical point, on p. 1116, of criticizing one of the fathers of the “Central Semitic” theory and most knowledgeable Ethiopic scholar, R. Hetzron, for rightly stating this time “that there could be no doubt that ‘Ethiopian Semitic’ and South Arabian ... constitute one branch of Semitic”.

For the same reason, this chapter contains repeated lame refutations of similarities between Arabic and Ethiopic, like saying on p. 1130 that “on a pure formal level, Gəʿəz quadri-consonantal roots could be connected with the quadri-consonantal roots of Arabic, but there are hardly any convincing lexical etymologies that bind single Arabic and Gəʿəz quadri-radicals together”, as if it was necessary to state that a parallel development is no proof of narrow kinship, although it is a moot question whether the similarity of procedures, such as infixation and suffixation of sonorants is absolutely meaningless to that effect. Neither is true, on p. 1132 that there are no traces of $\{aCCūC\}$ broken plurals in Arabic,³³ or that the individual lexemes differ in the choice of broken plural patterns in most cases,³⁴ nor is there any mention on p. 1133 of the fact that the substitution of *kəl'e* “two” in Gəʿəz for the standard Pan-Semitic numeral, being partially matched by *kilā* “both” in Arabic = *kl(')y* in Sabaic = *kəlō(h)* in Mehri, and kindred forms in other MSA languages, is a by no means insignificant shared innovation of the traditional South Semitic subgroup.³⁵

with pan-Semitic issues from the narrow viewpoints of the specialization of their authors in limited areas of the whole, like saying on p. 1116, that “*ā-Ablaut for feminine adjectives (e.g. *ḥaddis* ‘new’, fem. *ḥaddas* in Gəʿəz), would be shared by MSA and ES as a sort of ‘core’ South-Semitic, when in fact it is not totally absent from Arabic either, e.g., in *radāḥ* “(woman) large in the hips”, a curious case of morpheme infixation, developed from former suffixation and thus reminiscent of the genesis of the broken plural system (see our *Introducción a la gramática comparada del semítico meridional*, Madrid, CSIC, 1996, p. 36.

³³ There are the cases of *a/umlūk* “Himyarite kings” and *aḥbū/uš* “Ethiopians”, recorded by the native lexicographers and possibly borrowed from South Arabian or from the Ethiopic dialect spoken by the *aḥābīš* settled in Alḥiḡāz, source of the host of Ethiopian items in the Qurʾān detected by Jeffery.

³⁴ In our aforementioned, *Problemática de la pluralidad en semítico*, p.19, we strived at proving that certain semantic categories tend to share similar broken plurals patterns in the three sub-branches of traditional south Semitic, like parts of the body, e.g., Arabic *ay'un* “eyes” = Gəʿəz *a'yant* = Mehri *ayénten*, Arabic *ar'us* “heads” = Gəʿəz *ar'ast*, Arabic *aydī* “hands” = Sabaic *'yd(w)*, Arabic *āḡān* “ears” Sabaic *'ḡn*, etc., although in the long run of many centuries, of course, semantic and morphological affinities have played havoc with any shared original distribution of templates.

³⁵ The innovation does not consist in the reutilization of the root $\{kl'\}$ as an alternative expression of this numeral, which happens also in Hebrew, Ugaritic and Akkadian, as is known, but in the degree of its assimilation to the grammatical category of nouns of numbers, including the feature of gender inflexion, i.e., Gəʿəz *kəlattu* = Arabic *kiltā* = Sabaic *kl'ty* = Mehri *kəlayt*.

Finally, the unease of those pretending that Ethiopic does not belong to the same subgroup as Arabic and South Arabian is patent in some ambiguous statement like that of pp. 1136-7: “There are a significant number of cultural terms that are common to Arabic, Sabaean and Gəʿəz to the exclusion of other Semitic languages. It is likely, but difficult to prove, that this is due to South Arabian cultural influence...”, in which a statement directly clashing with the basic concept of the “Central Semitic hypothesis” is immediately countered, as in the case of other obvious proofs of its fallacy, with the mere supposition of an external circumstance of a non-linguistic nature.³⁶

There are also some hints at “politically correct” statements which do not entirely do justice to scientific truth,³⁷ like the unwarranted assumption on p. 515, in the chapter on Mishnaic Hebrew by M. Bar-Asher, that “Tannaitic Hebrew reflects a living spoken Hebrew”, a nationalistic tenet again repeated on p. 516, “it is widely acknowledged that it was a vernacular language in different areas of Eres Yisrāʾél throughout the Second Temple period”: A. Sáenz-Badillos, the author of the chapter “Hebrew as the Language of Judaism”, is much more accurate on p. 540, when he specifies that “there is evidence to suggest that in some Palestinian cities colloquial Hebrew was still employed until the end of the 2nd century CE in the teaching activity of the first rabbis”, i.e., very much like Latin in European Catholic seminars, which nobody would dare calling “living spoken Latin”. The same would apply to the definition of Biblical Hebrew, on p. 480, in the chapter with that same title, by L. Edzard, as “the language of ancient Israelite tribes who settled in the land known as Canaan”, instead of “adopted by the ancient Israelite tribes upon settling in the land of Canaan”, and his understatement next on p. 508, “it has also been suggested that the Biblical Hebrew consecutive past is in some way related to the Egyptian *iw sdm-n-f* forms”, which is, in fact, a nearly certain hypothesis when due consideration is paid to the fact there can be little doubt that the Israelites most likely spoke only Egyptian before their settling in Canaan, and that there is nothing equivalent to the “conversive *wāw*” in Semitic,³⁸ or again on p. 509 his new understatement

³⁶ This issue was tackled and that reckoning done justice in our recent paper “Lexicostatistics and the Central Semitic theory”, in Šapal tibnim mā illak. *Studies Presented to Joaquín Sanmartín on the occasion of his 65th birthday*, en *Aula Orientalis-Supplementa* 22 (2006) 139-144.

³⁷ Clashing with the editors purpose (p. 1) of producing “a comprehensive, unbiased description of the state of the art in Semitic”.

³⁸ Except in Ugaritic, as described by C. Gordon, *Ugaritic Text Book. Grammar*, Roma, Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1965, p. 69, as characteristic of only prose, not poetry: this would suggest a scribal habit, borrowed from Egyptian models, in a manner reminiscent of the “calques stylistiques” in Arabic, from English and French, studied by V. Monteil, *L’arabe moderne*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1960, pp. 306-312, proving that there are no real boundaries, such as could be those of linguistic genetic kinship, for the expansion of idioms coined in prestigious languages of a given epoch. But, of course and against the implication of that paragraph, the “conversive *wāw*” bears no relation to the case of optative ‘azza wa-jalla in Classical Arabic, mentioned by this author,

that in Hebrew “individual terms are possibly of Egyptian origin”, with a meagre set of three examples, which give the wrong image of the quite different factual situation.

Etymologies appear not to have been properly tended to: thus, for instance, on p. 187, in the chapter of “Proto-Semitic Lexicon”, by L. Kogan, the attribution of Hebrew *pātān* to Aramaic clashes with its Ugaritic cognate *bṭn*; next on p. 189, our friend and colleague shows surprise by the absence of an Aramaic intermediate between Arabic *ṭarfā*’ and Akk. *ṭarpa’u* “tamarisk”, as if both languages had not been neighbours for millennia³⁹, and on p. 204 one misses a hint at least at the possibility that Hebrew *bāšāl* “onion” and its Semitic cognates be borrowed from the Egyptian item reflected by Coptic *mčōl*. Likewise, on p. 446, in the chapter “Northwest Semitic in General”, H. Gzella tries to connect Akkadian *ragāmu* “to cry” with Aramaic {*trgm*} “to translate”, apparently alien to the fact that this is a well-known loanword in Semitic from Hittite.⁴⁰ Also, on p. 531, in the chapter on “Modern Hebrew” by O. Schwarzwald, it is doubtful that *xasér lo bóreg* “insane” (literally: “he misses a screw”) be borrowed from Yiddish, since *bóreg* is an obvious loanword from Turkish *burgu*, which points to the Middle Eastern Sephardic milieu, in which Spanish speakers have an old patrimonial equivalent, “faltar un tornillo”, closer to that idiom than German “beim ihm it eine Schraube locker”, which must be the antecedent of that Yiddish metonymy. Again, in the chapter consecrated to “Language Contact between Arabic and Modern European Languages” by L. Edzard, one is stricken, if not straightly appalled by certain would-be genetic connections, like the one on p. 1023 between German *Sippe* and Hebrew *mišpaḥah* “due to the fact that Carthaginians colonized the North Sea region”, or on p. 1024 his acceptance as good Arabic of *amīn ‘āmm al’umam almuttaḥida* “the Secretary-General of the United Nations”, his attribution of Eastern Neo-Arabic *lokanda* to Turkish, instead of Italian, and of *šurṭah* “police”

apparently unaware of the intricate details of the aspect interplay of perfective and imperfective in this language. However, some of the uses of *wa-* in Old Arabic, such as that of an oath particle and the accusative governing but semantically prepositional *wāwu ma’iyyah* suggest that at the root of this pan-Semitic conjunction there is more than meets the eye. Incidentally and concerning other presumed parallels in Arabic of the Hebrew inversive *wāw*, this cannot be the case on p. 297, in the chapter on “Morphological Typology of Semitic” by O. D. Gensler, who connects Hebrew *wattiqbor* “and you buried” with the Arabic negative *lam taqbūr* “you did not bury”, a simple instance of preservation of the old Semitic perfective in the restricted context of a peculiar negative particle.

³⁹ As shown by coarse pan-Arabic *zibb* “penis”, an obvious euphemism based on Akk. *zibbatum* “tail”, or by South Arabian *bltn*, whence even Ethiopic *bännāt*, from Akk. *biltum*, “tribute”, according to Leslau, both undeniable instances of direct borrowing from Akkadian by South Semitic languages.

⁴⁰ An information available in Leslau’s *Comparative dictionary of Gə’əz*, p. 580, taken over from A. Salonen, “Alte Substrakt- und Kulturwörter im Arabischen”, in *Studia Orientalia*, xvii:2, 12, and C. Rabin, *Orientalia* 32 (1963) 134-6.

to phonetically impossible Latin *cohors*, instead of Aramaic **šutṛā*,⁴¹ or again on p. 1027 his naïve acceptance of Castilian *hidalgo* and **dueño de la traición* as “syntagmatic calques”,⁴² and of Andalusí Arabic **kurniḥa* as a “Spanish substratal loanword”,⁴³ not to speak of his alleged derivation of Arabic *balad* from Latin *palatium*,⁴⁴ finally, to put an end to what could be a longer list of etymological audacities in this chapter, it must be signalled that French *mesquin* (p. 1029) is an old medieval loanword from Arabic, either borrowed directly during the Crusades or through other Southern Romance languages, but in no way connected with the slang terms borrowed from North African colonies of the past two centuries, while *bézeḥ* “very much”, which is indeed such a case, does not reflect Arabic *bissayf* “with the sword”, but *bilǧizāf* “by the score”, through North African *bazzāf*.

Concerning technical terms both in the realm of general linguistics and Semitic, abbreviations and transcription systems, this manual has such shortcomings as the absence of a minimal amount of standardisation, lack of cross-references and explanation of the terms chosen by each contributor, and unnecessary originalities, like on p. 284, in the chapter on “Morphological Typology of Semitic”, in which O. Gensler informs us that “these fixed vowel patterns (or ‘CV templates’) are *commonly* (our bold face) called *banyan-im*”,

⁴¹ The traditional interpretation was a derivation of Latin *scorta*, also phonetically impossible but, as we explained in our *A Dictionary of Andalusí Arabic*, Leiden – N. York – Köln, Brill, 1997, p. 280, chances are that Biblical Hebrew *šoter* “overseer, officer” of Akkadian origin, where the verb *šātāru(m)* “to write” has developed meanings implying the exercise of authority, is the true origin of such a term, through an unattested Aramaic form, parallel to *šṭārā* “deed”, but with a semantic evolution towards that forcible exercise of authority and control.

⁴² This cherished prototype of supposed calques in Iberian languages of Arabic phrases in works such as those of A. Castro’s and H.L.A. van Wijk’s in the middle of the past century was pronounced illusive already in our contribution “Arabic and the Romance languages” in Salma K. Jayyusi (ed.), *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, Leiden, Brill, 1992, 443-451, esp. 445-6. As for **dueño de la traición*, it has long since been established that occasional calques due to the translator’s incompetence or hurry cannot be accounted as cases of true interference between Arabic and Romance.

⁴³ Apparently unaware of the fact that the phoneme /h/, developed in modern Castilian did not yet exist in Alcalá’s days, so that his >j< only matches /ǧ/, both in his Arabic and Castilian spellings, which becomes evident, e.g., in Dozy’s *Supplément* II 348.

⁴⁴ Such an infelicitous etymon appears to have been taken from A. Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary of Qur’an*, Baroda, 1938, or from Nöldeke, Fraenkel or Vullers, quoted by that author, but it is unlikely both semantically, as there is great difference between a palace and a country, and phonetically, as Latin or Greek /p/ and /t/ were not reflected by /b/ and /d/, respectively, in the presumable dates of the alleged loan; in our paper “Some notes on the Qur’ānic *lisānun mubīn* and its loanwords”, (in *Sacred Text. Explorations in Lexicography*, Frankfurt-Berlin-Bern-Brussels... etc., eds. J.P. Monferrer & A. Urban 2009, 31-45, esp. 36), we put forward the hypothesis of a South Semitic cognate of Sabaic *blwd* “settlement” = Arabic *mawlid* = Ethiopic *mulād* “native land”, with the characteristic areal phenomena of dissimilation and/or exchange of bilabial phonemes.

which is indeed the case in Hebrew grammar, but has never superseded the usual “forms”, “stems”, “measures” in standard Western usage, and is no less awkward than Arabic *wazn* and its plural *awzān* would be. Concerning transcription, Romanization of one kind or another, a must in this type of wide-range works, should not have been allowed exceptions like that of the chapters on “Jewish Palestinian Aramaic” and “Jewish Babylonian Aramaic” by the eminent scholar M. Sokoloff, and partially in A. Tal’s chapter on “Samaritan Aramaic” and M. Morgenstern’s chapter on “Christian Palestinian Aramaic”, since acquaintance with every kind of Semitic script, including the Hebrew alphabet, cannot be expected from every Semitic scholar, not to speak of generalists, as reflected by the fact that such a feature does not happen again in the whole volume, without accompanying transcription, e.g., in chapters consecrated to Arabic and Ethiopic languages and dialects. No less unconventional, in our opinion, are terms like “pro-drop” on p. 314, and “valence”, some lines below, in the chapter on “Syntactic typology of Semitic”, authored by M. Waltisberg, which appear to mean “prone to drop personal pronouns” and “complements”; the same would next apply to the abbreviation TAM on p. 317, which appears to mean “tense, mood and aspect”, unlike TMA of p. 271, both without deciphering in any part of the volume. We would, of course, attribute such partialities to school habits, and not to ideological biases, although these may at times be subconsciously present, as might be the case of the total omission in the related chapters of a linguist like C. Meinhof who provided deep insights into phenomena like the noun class system in African languages, not totally alien to Afrasian and useful for comparison, at least.⁴⁵ Also concerning strange use of technical terms, one wonders on p. 455, in the chapter “Amorite” by M. Streck, why he thinks that *šamarātu* “certain sheep” and *rababātu* “tens of thousands” should be labelled as “broken plurals”; by the same token, some additional information on technical terms is missed in cases like p. 783, where the statement by J. Retsö in the chapter on “Classical Arabic”, “In German literature the term *Hocharabisch* ‘High-Arabic’ is nowadays often found” may give the reader the impression of

⁴⁵ In his work, *Die Sprachen der Hamiten*, Hamburg, 1912. As other Semitic scholars have accepted, the underlying presence in Afrasian of vestiges of a noun class system, and most particularly of the 1st “more important class” and the 2nd “less important class” provides the key to understanding the curious status of feminine gender in Semitic, often sharing its mark with diminutives and abstract nouns, as well as the feature of identical marking, also {-t-} for the 2msg and 3fsg persons of the imperfective, which Gensler declares “unmotivated and functionally strange”. Curiously enough, on p. 292, however, he is quite aware of “a covert gender distinction involving animacy, crosscutting the standard division into masculine and feminine”, which amounts to acknowledging a residual effect of a noun class system. On the other hand, L. Edzard, on p. 490, in the chapter “Biblical Hebrew” has no qualms about the semantic comparison of a group of terms with the Bantu noun classes.

a calque from *Hochdeutsch* when, in fact, *alluġatu l'ulyā* was coined by native Arab grammarians since their oldest days.⁴⁶

Some pesky printing mistakes have slept in, which is nearly unavoidable in an extensive text with so many typographical difficulties, e.g., on p. 20, where the true meaning of Berber *tam* is not “3”, but “8”, or p. 181 “superceded”, or on p. 44 “Neo-Aramanic”, or on p. 490, **layā(h)* “night”, for *laylā(h)*, or on p. 757, where *Al-Rabaʿ al-Khālī is possibly a mistake for a al-Rubʿ, caused by the reproduction of an older map, or on p. 766, in which the transcription of the Dumatic inscription has skipped the pr.n. >ʿtrsʿl m<, or on p. 785, in which the articulation of Arabic ‘emphatics’ is described as accompanied with a “widening” of the pharynx, which can only be a mistake for “narrowing”,⁴⁷ or on p. 824, **lamda* for the name of the Greek letter *lambda*, or on p. 841, *kamāḥ* instead of *kāmaḥ* “sauce”, or on p. 859, in which the period “the analogous treatment of the geminate verbs, which made them indistinguishable from form II of the IIIw/y verbs” has been split in the middle, thus creating a nonsensical fifth feature “from form II of the IIIw/y verbs”, or again on p. 863 *”prejorative”, instead of “prerogative”, or on p. 866 **ġibh* “beehive”, for *ġa/ubḥ*, or on p. 936 “There may have been Arabic speaker(s)”, or on p. 937 **širbat* “she drank” for *širbit*. At times, there are mere spelling inconsistencies like, on p. 368, in the chapter “Babylonian and Assyrian” by M. Streck, Boghazköy instead of Boğazköy next to other words in which the modern Turkish spelling is observed, or, a few lines below, the infelicitous phrasing, “Assyrian vowel-harmony (a term borrowed from Turkish)”, whence the reader can only gather that “harmony” is a Turkish term, although the author’s aim is obviously to say that vowel-harmony is a law in Turkish phonology.

⁴⁶ We warned against this possible mistake in our aforementioned paper in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 21, esp. 66-67, fn. 3.

⁴⁷ This is the actual meaning of the native technical term *iṭbāq*, which describes this type of articulation; however, four lines before the reader had already been surprised by objections to the medieval and standard description of /h/ and /ʿ/ as pharyngeals, such as that “modern phonetic studies indicate that they are all articulated in the larynx”, against the continuous experience of any speaker of Arabic, who can distinctly feel the contraction of his pharynx upon uttering these sounds, although the larynx may simultaneously open, with some impact on spectrograms and other technical registering devices, in order to let the air flow unimpeded upwards towards the narrow passage between the walls of the pharynx, where the fricative articulation takes place, precisely avoiding any kind of glottalization.