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AFROASIATIC AT A CROSSROADS: FORWARDS OR BACK?¹

The collective monograph is introduced by the chapter „Semitic and Afroasiatic“, written by Lutz Edzard (pp. 23-58), and continues with descriptions of the remaining five branches of Afroasiatic: Egyptian by Ruth Kramer (pp. 59-130); Berber by Mohamed Elmedlaoui (pp. 131-198); Cushitic by David Appleyard (pp. 199-261, 278-295), supplemented by the grammatical sketch of Sidaama by Kjell Magne Yri (pp. 262-277); Chadic by Herrmann Jungraithmayr (pp. 296-368); Omotic by Rolf Theil (pp. 369-384) and a ‘Sketch Grammar of an Omotic Language: Koorete’ by Binyam Sisay Mendisu (pp. 385-398). The book is closed by Index of Subjects (pp. 399-410) and Index of Authors (pp. 411-414). The separate bibliographies accompany all chapters. Surprisingly brief is the contribution devoted to Semitic, especially with respect to ambition of the author Lutz Edzard, the chief-editor of whole volume, to illustrate a wider relationship with other Afroasiatic branches. His attempt to provide an overview of the family is rather embarrassing. The author presents one model of classification of the Semitic languages, namely by Alice Faber (1997), but without any discussion of other models, mediated by e.g. Kaye 1991, plus the variant based on the ‘recalibrated’ glottochronology by A. Militarev (SED I, XL-XLI). Not better is the situation with the classification of Afroasiatic at all. The author offers even eight various models (p. 25: Greenberg 1963; Newman 1980; Fleming: after 1981; Ehret 1995; Orel & Stolbova 1995; Diakonoff 1996; Bender 1997; Militarev 2000), but again without any discussion. In the field of phonology

¹ This is a review article of *Semitic and Afroasiatic: Challenges and Opportunities*, edited by Lutz Edzard. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2012 (Porta Linguarum Orientalium, Neue Serie. Herausgegeben von Werner Diem und Lutz Edzard, Band 24), pp. 414. ISSN 0554-7342 / ISBN 978-3-447-06695-2

Edzard mentions triads of the type *t, d, t*, the Cushitic substratum in the phonological systems of Ethiosemitic, compatibility and incompatibility in Arabic and Hebrew mapped by Greenberg, generalized as the so-called ‘Obligatory Contour Principle’, illustrated e.g. by Geers’ law for Akkadian, forbidding two emphatic consonants within one root, or Greenberg and McCarthy’s observation that within one root only one guttural appears in Hebrew and Arabic, or the dissimilation of *m*-prefixes to *n*-, if any labial is present in the root, with examples from Akkadian and Berber. Similarly accidentally chosen features have to illustrate the morphology, e.g. triradicalism vs. biradicalism, affixes characterizing Semitic diatheses, independent & dependent personal pronouns, causative affixes, morphological roles of gemination, *t*-infix & *n*-prefix, external & internal, i.e. broken, nominal plurals, a hypothetical diptotic case system, illustrated by examples from Arabic, Amharic, Borana Oromo and Berber (without any specification). But the really reconstructible system is more abundant (Dolgopolsky 1991; Blažek 2006, 92-93):

	* Sem.	Akk.	* Ebl.	Amarna	Ugar.	Hebr.	Aram.	ClArab.	EpNAr.	EpSAr.	Geez
Sg. Indet.											
nom.	-u	-ø			-u(m?)	-ø	-ø	-u		-V	
acc.	-a	-ø			-a(m?)	-ø	-ø	-a		-V	-a
gen.	-i	-ø			-i(m?)	-ø	-ø	-i		-V	
loc.	-uma	-um	-ūm	-ama	-VmV	-om	-ū	-u			-u
dir.-d.	-a/iš	-iš	-iš		-h	-ā(h)					
pred.	-a	-ø	-a			-ø	-ø	-a			-a
Sg. Det.											
nom.	-u-m	-um	-um		-u(m)	-ø	-ø	-un		-Vm	-ø
acc.	-a-m	-am	-a(m)		-a(m)	-ø; adv. -ām	-ø; adv. -ā	-an		-Vm	-a
gen.	-i-m	-im	-im		-i(m)	-ø	-ø	-in		-Vm	-ø
Du. Indet.											
nom.	-ā	-ā	-ā		/-ā/			-ā			
a.-g.	-ay	-ī			/-ē/	-ē	-ē	-ay	-ay	-y	
pred.	-ā	-ā						-ā			
Du. Det.											
nom.	-ā-ni	-ān	-ān		-m /-āmi/	-m		-āni	-n	-n(y) Q -my	
a.-g.	-a y - ni	-īn	-ayn	-ēma/i	-m /-ēmi/	-āyim		-ayni		-yn	
Pl. A Indet.											
nom.	-ū	-ū	-ū		-u /-ū/		Y. -w				
a.-g.	-ī	-ī	-ī		-i /-ī/		Y. -y	-ī			
pred.	-ū	-ū				-ū		-ū		-w	-ū

Pl. A Det.										
nom.	- ū - ma				-um(a) /-ūma/			-ūna		
a.-g.	-ī-ma				-im(a) /-īma/	-īm	-īn	-īna		-VnV
Pl. B Indet.										
nom.	-āt-u	-āt			-t	-ōt	-āt	-ātu		
a.-g.	-āt-i	-āt			-t	-ōt	-āt	-āti		
pred.	-ā	-ā					-ā	-ā		-ā
Pl. B Det.										
nom.	- ā t - u-m	-ātum	-ātum		-t	-ōt		-ātun		-āt
a.-g.	- ā t - i-m	-ātim	-ātim		-t	-ōt		-ātin		-āt

Abbreviations: a(cc). accusative, Akk. Akkadian, Ar. Arabian, Arab. Arabic, Aram. Aramaic, Cl. Classical, d. dative, det. determined, dir. directive, Ebl. Eblaic, Ep. Epigraphic, g(en). genitive, Hebr. Hebrew, indet. indetermined, loc. locative, N North, nom. nominative, pred. predicative, Q. Qatabanian, S South, Ugar. Ugaritic, Y. Yahudic.

Syntax is again introduced by several examples of syntactic pattern in Arabic and Amharic, plus Hebrew and Egyptian. Lexical connections between Semitic and other Afroasiatic branches are illustrated by similarities of interrogative and negative markers! The author judges that these unsystematic examples may demonstrate usefulness of external comparisons for Semitic within Afroasiatic. Instead of this commonplace more startling is what is missing in the first chapter. One would expect more systematic explanation and discussion of both the Semitic declension and conjugation patterns in the Afroasiatic context (not speaking of numerals which are missing), especially with respect to new facts mediated by Eblaite, vocalized Ugaritic, Egyptian, current progress in reconstructions of partial protolanguages of various Cushitic, Chadic or Berber (sub)branches. Surprising is absence of any information on the most ambitious, although yet unfinished, comparative-lexicological work devoted to the Semitic languages, started by David Cohen in 1970 and continued by Jérôme Lentin, François Bron & Antoine Lonnet still in 2012, when the letter K was reached (see DRS). The thematically organized *Semitic Etymological Dictionary* (I: Anatomical terminology – 2000; II: Zoological terminology – 2005) by Militarev & Kogan (see SED) is mentioned only as a source of classification models. From 10 studies devoted to comparative grammar of Semitic or Afroasiatic published in the period of 15 years before the publication of *Semitic and Afroasiatic: Challenges and Opportunities*, only four titles, namely Bennett (1998), Haelewyck (2006), Lipiński (1997/2001), Stempel (1999), appear in References, while six titles are omitted, namely Belova et al. (2009), Dolgopolsky (1999), Frajzyngier &

Shay (2012), Kienast et al. (2001), Lonnet & Mettouchi (2005-2006), Weninger (2012). It is naturally understandable in the case of titles published in 2012, but not in the case of older publications.

The chapter devoted to Egyptian by Ruth Kramer is divided into two parts, on Earlier Egyptian and on Later Egyptian & Coptic. In her survey of the Egyptian consonantism Kramer prefers the opposition voiceless vs. emphatic voiceless than voiceless vs. voiced consonants. She also mentions the controversy in interpretation of the sign transcribed as *ʕ*, traditionally connected with Semitic **ʕ*, but according to so-called Rösslerian reinterpretation representing a counterpart of Semitic **d*. In the following text Kramer quotes some Egyptian-Semitic lexical and grammatical parallels, namely numerals (p. 110) and prepositions (p. 74), following the model of phonetic correspondences formulated by Rössler. It is pity that she does not devote any space to discussion of these two models, in details analyzed by Takács (1999, 333-393). Rather strange is her statement that the Egyptian phoneme /*h*/ has no Afroasiatic counterpart (p. 63). Takács (1999, 143-48) has collected 24 Egyptian forms with cognates in other Afroasiatic branches, indicating the legitimacy of Afroasiatic **h*. After a brief information about root structure, the author explains the nominal morphology, gender, number and case. She admits the existence of traces of the case endings corresponding to the Semitic endings, namely nom. **-u*, acc. **-a*, gen. **-i* (p. 66). It is pity that Kramer did not offer more information about possibilities of reconstruction of these case endings. There are certain traces in Egyptian proper. Most important is the evidence of transcriptions of proper names in the syllabic cuneiform script or Greek alphabet. In specific positions and contexts the original vowels were preserved and regularly reflected in Coptic:

Nominative **-u* was directly reflected in the Egyptian script as *-w* only in the case of the preceding vowel **-a*- (Loprieno 1995, 55).

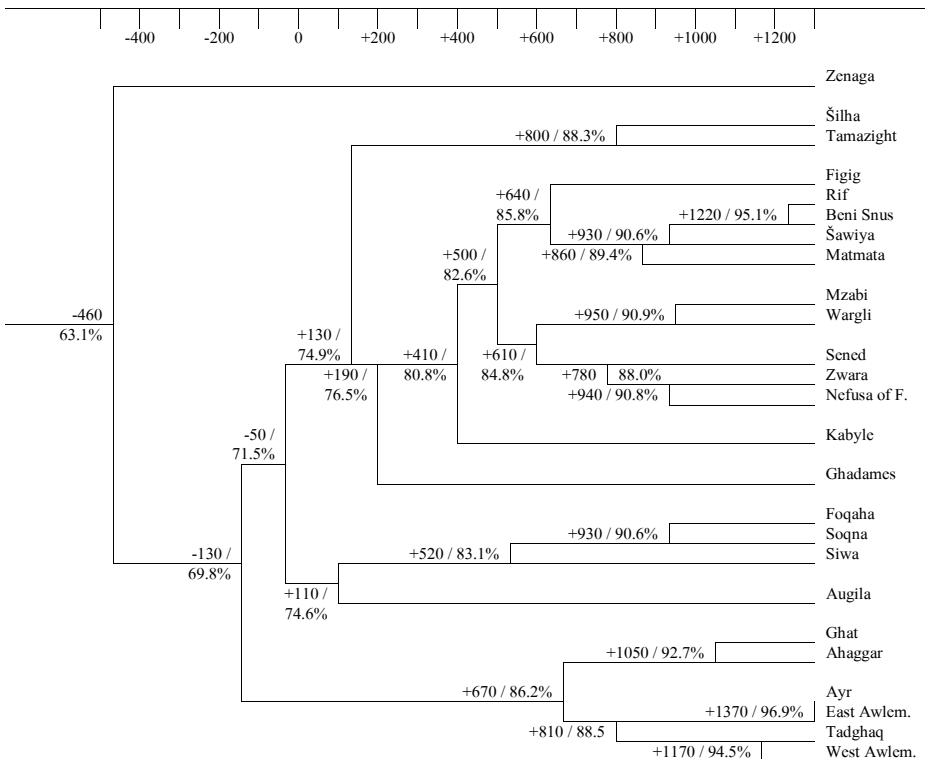
Genitive in **-i* in the construction NOUN + SUFFIXAL PRONOUN: Coptic *hraf* „his face“ < Egyptian *hr.f* = **har-i.f* (Loprieno 1995, 56). The vowel *-i-* is also preserved in Greek transcription *-vīβις* of Egyptian *nb.f* „his lord“ = **nīb-i.f* (Vycichl 1984, 138) and in the cuneiform Assyrian transcription of *rn.f* „his name“ = **rinn-i.f* in the personal name *ᵐBu-kur-ni-ni-ip*, corr. **bu-ku-un-ri-ni-ip*, i.e. *B3k n rn.f* „servant of his name“ = **bōk-ēn rīn-i.f* (Vycichl 1984, 176; Id. 1990, 189).

Accusative / absolutive in **-a* in the construction PREPOSITION + SUFFIXAL PRONOUN: Coptic *erof* „on him“ < Egyptian *ir.f* = **yīr-ā.f* (Vycichl 1984, 37; Id. 1990, 128; Loprieno 1995, 100: **iaráf*). Other traces of the corresponding accented form in *-ā* are supposed in the subjunctives of the type *dj.t h3j-* = **dīyit-hazyá-* „to cause him to build“ > Coptic *thio*, *dj.ᶜnh* “to keep alive” = **dīyit-šanśá* > Coptic *tanho*, *dj.t s3w* “to make sated” = **dīyit-sazyá* > Coptic *tsio*, etc. (Loprieno 1995, 82, 224; Vycichl 1984, 57, 222, 218).

Similarly laconically is sketched the verbal morphology. With respect to the earlier stages of the language, it would be useful to derive the Middle Egyptian ending *-w(j)n* of the 1st person plural of the stative conjugation (p. 71) from a more

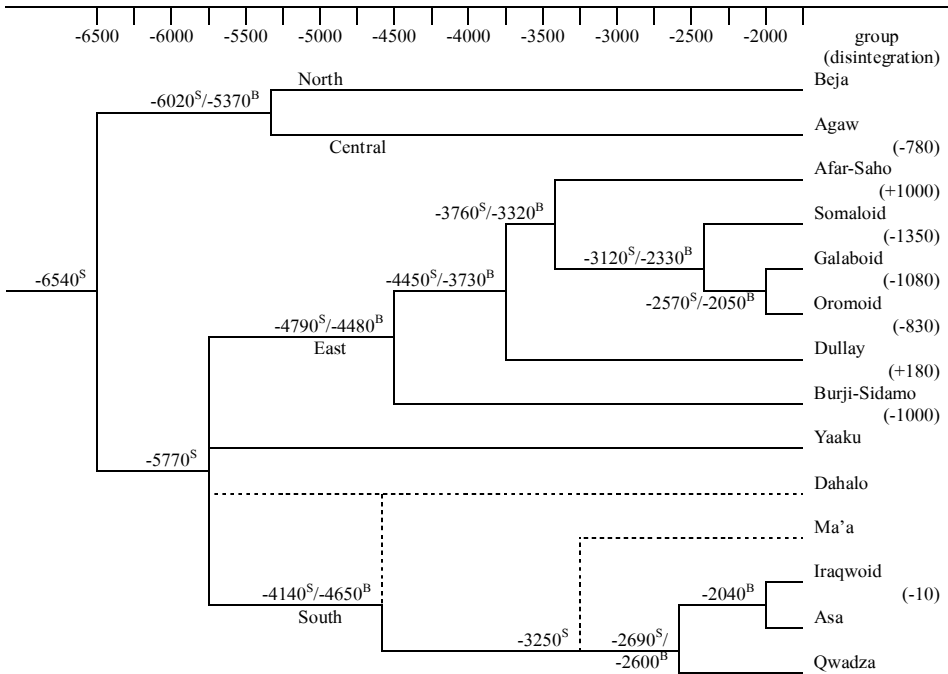
archaic form *-nwj*, attested still in the Pyramid texts (PT 1646 b^M; see Edel 1955, 273), as far as the Middle Egyptian dependent personal pronoun *wj* of the 1st person singular (p. 73) from **jw*, if the corresponding enclitic was *-j* (Edel 1955, 76). The final part of the grammatical sketch of Egyptian is devoted to syntax. The Later Egyptian & Coptic are described in similar way, only the role of syntax is stronger. The chapter is accompanied by text samples with translations and grammatical comments. Incomprehensible is omission of any discussion about questions about vocalisation of Egyptian or progress in Egyptian and Coptic lexicology (cf. Černý 1976/2010; Hannig 1995, 2000, 2003, 2000/2006, Hannig & Vomberg 1999; Kahl et alii 2002-2004; Lesko et al. 2002-2004; Meeks 1998; Vycichl 1984, 1990).

In the sketch of Berber, the author, Mohamed Elmedlaoui, rejects the outdated idea of a common Berber language and prefers the model of more or less closely related languages and dialects. The comparison with Germanic languages (p. 136), following Kossmann (1999), is quite valid, if the Berber disintegration is dated to c. 460 BCE and the Germanic disintegration to 450 BCE, applying the same method of recalibrated glottochronology based on average values. Incomprehensible is the absence of any classification of the Berber languages in the chapter. For this reason the most recent model is introduced here (Blažek 2010):



In the proto-Berber consonant inventory rather enigmatic symbols appear, namely /d and /z (p. 136), followed by /t, /s, /r, /l, /n, /š, /ž in Tashlhiyt (p. 142). Do they represent the emphatic consonants ḍ, ṣ etc. in traditional orthography? Does the absence of t (p. 136) mean that this stop cannot be reconstructed for the Berber protolanguage? Almost the whole chapter is a description of only one Berber language, Tashlhiyt, including two text samples. An exception is a list of 50 lexical parallels between Tashlhiyt or 'Berber' (without any more concrete information) on the one hand and Arabic, Hebrew or 'Semitic' on the other hand. Although some of comparisons are undoubtedly interesting, others are more than problematic, especially when the author offers more counterparts, e.g. Arabic $\sqrt{q-m-r}$ „to be intensely white“, *qamar* „moon“ is compared with 'Berber' *a-yyis a-g^wmar* „white horse“, but also with 'Berber' *a-šmlal* „white“, although the root of the latter word is only $\sqrt{m-l-l}$, and š- is the causative prefix. Surprising is absence of any information about the most ambitious, although yet unfinished, comparative-lexicological work devoted to the Berber languages by Naït-Zerrad (1998/1999/2002) and in the discussion of the ancient Libyc script the careful palaeographic study of Pichler (2007), identifying the oldest inscriptions in Northern Morocco and dating them before 600 C.E.

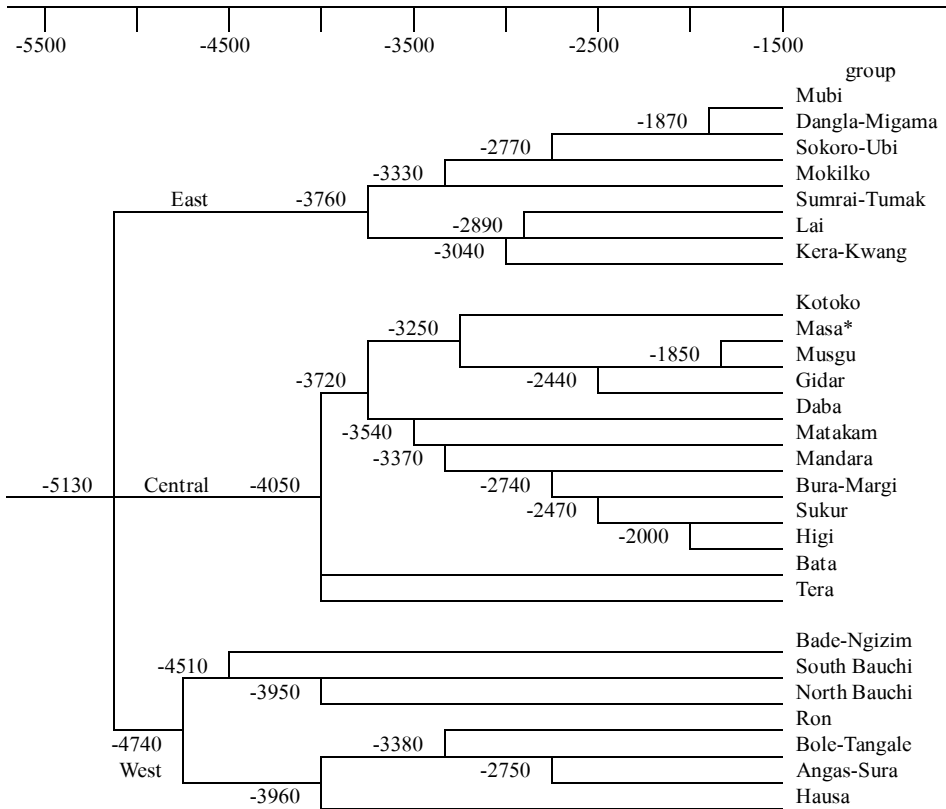
The difficult task to describe the Cushitic superbranch was carried out by David Appleyard (pp. 199-295). He starts with the biggest languages, concerning the numbers of speakers. The order: Oromo (18 mill. speakers), Somali (13 mill.), Sidaama (2.9 mill.), Beja (1.2 mill.), Afar (1 mill.), is very probably correct, but the numbers of speakers are at present very probably higher. E.g. in the last issue of *Ethnologue* (17th edition, 2012) the total number of speakers of Oromo only in Ethiopia is estimated to 30 mill., total number of all Somali speakers to 16.5 mill. and Afar almost to 1.4 mill. A brief discussion of classification of the Cushitic languages follows. He correctly rejects the groundless attempts to divorce Beja from Cushitic (e.g. Hetzron), expresses his doubts concerning the unambiguous South Cushitic affiliation of Dahalo, hesitates concerning the status of Omotic. Rather problematic is the traditional point of view of Ma'a/ Mbugu, interpreted as a hybrid with the South Cushitic lexicon and Bantu morphology, kept also by Appleyard (p. 200). The real situation is analyzed and reinterpreted by Mous (2003). Since the author offers none concrete model of classification of the Cushitic languages, the following scheme based on unpublished results of George Starostin (2010), indicated by the upper index ^S, and reviewer (Blažek 1997), indicated by the upper index ^B should be offered. Both models of Cushitic classification agree in topology and may be depicted in one diagram. Only the positions of Dahalo and Ma'a are problematic, having been influenced by strong substrata and adstrata (Ehret, Elderkin, Nurse 1989).



Further the author brings typological characteristics of the Cushitic languages, beginning from phonology, through nominal determination, number, case, personal pronouns, verbal morphology, to syntax. In the following part the grammatical sketches and text samples of chosen illustrative languages are presented, namely Beja, Bilin, Oromo, Somali, Sidaama (written by Kjell Magne Yri), Iraqw. Surprising is again the absence of information on comparative-lexicological works, including his own *Comparative Dictionary of the Agaw Languages* (2006), Sasse's *Etymological Dictionary of Burji* (1982), or Kießling & Mous' *West-Rift Lexical Reconstruction of Southern Cushitic* (2003).

The Chadic branch is described by Herrmann Jungraithmayr (pp. 296-368). After the brief historical and methodological introduction, including the terminologic excursion, he summarizes basic typological features of the Chadic languages, beginning from phonology, nominal morphology consisting of gender and number, pronominal morphology and verbal morphology. In the paragraph devoted to lexicon he presents c. 30 common Chadic lexemes. Both approaches, synchronic and diachronic, are combined in the chapters „A relative chronology of the development of the Chadic languages“ and final „Typological overview“. In the second part there are sketches of three West Chadic languages: Kulere, Mushere, Tangale, and one East Chadic language, Mubi. The author mentions only briefly that the Chadic languages are divided into three branches,

West (Northern Nigeria), Central (Northern Cameroon) and East (South Central Chad). His detailed classification (see Jungraithmayr & Ibriszimow 1994) may be supported by the unpublished classification of George Starostin (2010), based on ‘recalibrated’ glottochronology (with a small modification in position of the Masa group):

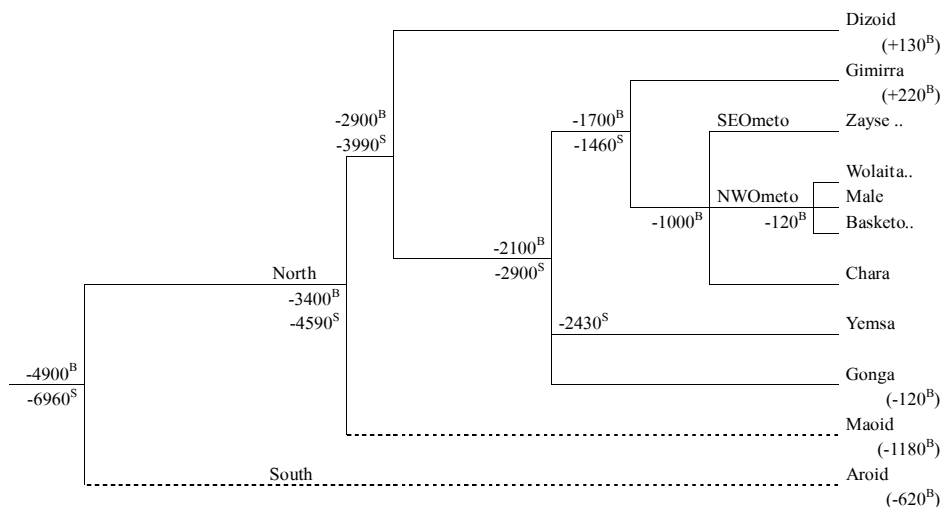


*Note: The close position of Masa to Musgu – see Tourneux 1990.

Similarly as in preceding chapters, some important comparative studies are omitted, e.g. Kraft (1981) or Stolbova (1987, 1996, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011).

The final chapter deals with Omotic languages (pp. 369-398). Rolf Theil writes a general introduction and concentrates on questions connected with

the internal classification of the Omotic languages and their relations to other Afroasiatic languages. Binyam Sisay Mendisu is the author of description of one chosen language, Koorete. In the part written by Rolf Theil there are a lot of mistakes and misprints, e.g. Koorete does not belong in the Gongga sub-branch (so p. 369), but Gimojan (so correctly p. 370). His formulation: 'Only shared innovations define genetic units' (p. 372) is also invalid, correctly the shared innovations define internal subgrouping, but as a proof of genetic relationship both shared innovations and archaisms are fundamental. If he writes ... *mass comparison* and *lexicostatistics*, invented by Joseph H. Greenberg and Morris Swadesh, respectively (p. 371), correctly it is the opposite: Greenberg used and defended (but not invented) mass comparison, while Swadesh developed glottochronology. He also cites Aari (South Omotic) *i-* „my“, *in* „me“ and adds a comment: 'Used by Greenberg to show Chadic links to Semitic' (p. 380). But if Theil writes about the South Omotic forms, it cannot be a proof of the Chadic links to Semitic! And the title of the work of Orel & Stolbova from 1995 is *Hamito-Semitic Etymological Dictionary*, not *Hamitic-Semitic Etymological Dictionary* (p. 384). The author categorically says on classification of Omotic as a branch of Afroasiatic: 'No convincing arguments have been presented in favour of this Afroasiatic Affiliation Hypothesis' (p. 369). He adds: '... in this chapter all conclusions are instead based on the comparative method, which has proven successful in the historical and comparative study of well established language families like Indo-European, Uralic, and Algic.' (p. 371). In reality, there are no traces of application of the classical comparative method operating with formulation of phonetic laws. On the other hand, just this approach was applied by Dick Hayward in his crucial study of the Omotic sibilants (1988). Other attempts to establish the sound correspondences belong to Bender (1988), Lamberti (1993) and Lamberti & Sottile (1997), all without any reference in the Omotic chapter. All these results are summarized in a special study, focused on the classification of the Omotic languages based on established sound rules (Blažek 2008), also unknown to Theil. Besides the internal relations between 40 more or less described Omotic languages, the external relations of Omotic with other Afroasiatic languages, not only Cushitic neighbours, are also evaluated. Theil sharply criticizes practically all positive research in the field of comparative Omotic studies, but does not present any concrete model of genetic classification of the Omotic languages. For this reason it should be useful to offer the following model, combining the results of Blažek (2008, 66) and Starostin (2010: ms.), common in topology and disagreeing only in time depth and some details:



Note: The interrupted lines indicate subbranches whose affiliation into Omotic is questioned with respect to Nilo-Saharan parallels to their unique pronominal systems. It means, the Aroid and Maoid subbranches could be ‘Omoticized’ (Zaborski 2004, 180-83 explicitly proposes their Nilo-Saharan origin). All diagrams included in this review article were firstly published in Blažek 2013.

Summing up, the present publication did not answer convincingly the challenges corresponding to the contemporary level of knowledge in the field of the Afroasiatic languages and did not use the opportunities offered by participation of such excellent scholars as David Appleyard or Herrmann Jungraithmayr. It is difficult to find a reason. With respect to the fact that e.g. David Appleyard does not quote his first-rate *Comparative Dictionary of the Agaw Languages* and also in other chapters the comparative studies are reduced to minimum, it was probably a universal conception of this collective monograph that led to accidental choice of features described without any wider context. It is a wasted opportunity.

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Acknowledgement

The present study was prepared thanks to the grant of the The Czech Science Foundation (GAČR), P406/12/0655.