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Articles

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ONOMASTIC AND LINGUISTIC NOTES ON THE EARLY AKSUMITE INSCRIPTIONS AND RELATED TEXTS

ONOMASTICS

1. Burial of two peoples

On the expression *mlkn* 'g^czyn of the grand inscription CIH 541:5,¹ written in Sabaic towards the middle of the 6th c. AD. by the rebel Ethiopian viceroy Abrəha (and left by him near the old capital Mārib), many hypotheses have been made (see the summary in Ryckmans 1951: 242-5, with additions in Drewes 1962:108). Parallels to the term 'g^czyn do not appear as such in the Ethiopic inscriptions, except the fixed expression "country of the 'A." (*bəḥera* 'ag^cāzi), or others similar to it, very frequent in the literary texts referred to the aksumite period (but all of them much later). This is maybe still an ethnic term, perhaps indicating the parts of the country which today are known to be those of the oldest Semitic settlement (in fact, Erythraea and Tigrāy). This same term seems to appear in the Greek inscription (2nd-3d century A. D.). called *Monumentum Adulitanum*,² copied in Adulis by Cosma Indicopleustes about 525, as "people of the *Gāze*": one of the numerous scholia of the text adds: "*Gāze* means the Axumites"; frequently a comparison with the term (adjective?) *Yg^cdyn*, which appears together with the title of "king" (*mlkn ṣr^cn yg^cdyn*) in the Sabaic inscriptions from Abyssinia of the 8th c. B. C.,³ has been proposed.

In our case, the basic linguistic fact is that this title cannot mean "king of the 'Ag^cāzyān", with 'g^czyn as the second term of a genetical relation, the linguistic reason is clear: *mlkn*, with an ending -n (morpheme of the definite article in Sabaic), cannot govern a genitive (if not, it would be determined twice) - not to speak of the ending -n, which would be justified in Geez only if this was an adjective or a participle; if a substantive it should have been -āi). But also many translations leave us disappointed, this time because also of the shortcomings of our European languages: "re, appartenente alla stirpe Ag^cazi", o "re di stirpe Ag^cazi" (both in Conti Rossini) is not so distant⁴ from the "rex Aethiopicus" of the CIH (1918). which was immediately condemned, because nowhere a king of Ethiopia is called "ethiopian king".⁵ It is perhaps because of this ambiguity that Ullendorff 1955:7 still speaks of "the South Arabian tribes who settled in what later became the Kingdom of Aksum, ... the Ḥabašāt and the Ag^cazyān [*sic*]". But now there is the formula *mlkn ṣr^cn yg^cdyn*,⁶ quoted above (unknown until the Sixties), which can be utilized in this connection; but here again Sima, the author of this item, translates "[king]... of (the tribe?) yg^cd". So, it is perhaps safer to translate with an adjective, "the ag^cazite⁷ king" or the like. (although this kind of adjective is very difficult to be accepted in a translation).

The second of these peoples are (were) the "Habashat" (*Hbs²t* in the original South Arabian spelling). It is well known that this "South Arabian" people (explained as such by Conti Rossini

¹ Of 136 lines on a monolith with four faces.

² Book II, Chap. 60.

³ Perhaps the first appearance in Caquot - Drewes 1955: 30 (according to the editors, if this word indicated the Geez, "il faudrait s'étonner de ce que l'inscription fût écrite dans un dialecte sud-arabe et non pas en guèze" !). See also Drewes 1962: 97 and *passim*.

⁴ Because both can presuppose a genetical relationship.

⁵ Conti Rossini 1928: 186, 188, and cp Schneider 1984: 162.

⁶ Cp. also EAe I, 144-5..

⁷ Drewes 1862: 97: "roi YG^cDeite"

1906, who followed in part Glaser 1895⁸) has become a simple indication of "Abyssinia" after the excellent study by Irvine 1965. But with all this, the ultimate origins of the name *Hbs²t* remains untouched. Any parallel with the 'Ag^cazyān (see below) is at the beginning misleading, because this latter term has a possible forerunner in the ethnicon (?) *yg^cdyn* of the Sabaic inscriptions in Ethiopia, whereas for *Hbs²t* there is no witness in the South Arabian epigraphy whatsoever. So, it should be an old term, but under king ʿĒzānā the inscriptions of the so-called "trilingual inscription" (in fact, a Graeco-Geez bilingual inscription in three writings: RIE 270 and 270bis [= DAE IV, 4], RIE 185 I-II and RIE 185 I-IIbis [= DAE IV, 6, 7]), besides inserting the title "king of *Hbs²t*" in different places as compared with the other royal inscriptions, makes the clear equation *Hbs²t* (Geez) = "Ethiopia" (Greek). This equivalence indicates that, like "Ethiopia", also *Hbs²t* should be a term which was not only ancient, but also general. So, maybe it could be permitted to resume the old hypothesis by Glaser himself, who identified the *Hbs²t* with the *ḥbs.tjw* of the Egyptian texts relating to Punt (Punt appears since the end of the 3d millennium), the well known country on the coast of southern Red Sea or the Somaliland, also quoted recently, but with the contrary solution, by W. W. Müller⁹ - although the question remains still open, of the reason why the general denomination of *Hbs²t* has disappeared (about that of "Ethiopia" nothing can be said, because no other Greek inscription with extended titles exists after RIE 270 and 270bis).¹⁰ The fact that the term "Habashat" as a Sabaic ethnicon has to be eliminated does not affect the South Arabian origin of the Semites of Ethiopia - if only, inside the term "South Arabian", one makes a distinction between "South Arabian" in general (that is, people[s] and language[s] coming from the South of the Arabian Peninsula, irrespective of the epoch - in short, the *Semites of the Peninsula* as meant by Christian 1919-20 and Cantineau. 1932), and "Epigraphic South Arabian" in the meaning traditional for Ethiopian studies, of the four (or more) dialects of the 1st millennium B. C. The indiscriminate usage of these two terms has brought the entire question of the "Ethiopian (linguistic) origins" into a blind alley: if the Ethiopians are not "derived" from the "South Arabians" in the second meaning,¹¹ this does not mean that they (quite naturally) are not the linguistic heirs the "South Arabians" in the first.¹²

⁸ Glaser put the origin of these "Habashat" in Ḥaḍramawt, taking into consideration a passage (already quoted by Ludolf in 1681 and 1691, of the geographer Stehen of Byzantium (4th c. A. D.), in turn from another geographer, Uranius (same century): "Beyond the Sabaeans [there are] the Abyssinians of the Ḥaḍramawt" (*Xatramōitai Abasēnoi*). See also Müller 2008.

⁹ EAe II (2005) 948. The argument by Müller is the excessive chronological distance between the two attestazioni: exactly one of the elements which we think are in favour of this hypothesis. The phonetic correspondance would be more or less regular.

¹⁰ Cp. Schneider 1987: 610,

¹¹ Reconfirmed by Ullendorff 1955 more than half a century ago. But his main thesis, that all the Semitic languages of Ethiopia derive from Ge'ez because all their relevant characteristics are found in Ge'ez, does not stand, because these characteristics are at the same time (Proto)Semitic, and no significant common innovation has been found so far; on the contrary opinion see the important observation by Beeston in his private letter quoted in Ullendorff 1955: fn. 30 pp. 8-9.

¹² If one denies a "general South Arabian" origin of the Ethiopians, he has maybe to accept the (in itself fascinating) hypothesis of Hudson 2002, according to whom the origin of the Semites should be sought exactly in the Ethiopian region today occupied by the Gurage, according to the principle (of clear American origin, i. e. of scholars who are mainly compelled to have to do with "languages without history" like those of the Redskins or the Eskimo: exactly for them Morris Swadesh invented glottochronology) of the "archaic heterogeneity", according to which where one finds the more extended dialectal variety, there he should look for the origin of a given group of languages - as if the greatest linguistic differentiation of Italian should be met in the surroundings of Rome, or all the migrations of the Semitic peoples would not be performed (except some "wandering Aramaean" like Abraham) from North to South, and not vice-versa. But the greatest difficulty lies in the fact of the phonological and morphological "regular" correspondences among the Semitic languages: it is impossible to suppose that they have developed from a common language from which many of them were absent, and recreated (with regular correspondences) in the single Semitic languages - unless all this is driven back to ... a pre-Semitic period. These elements have escaped the attention not only of a non-Semitist like G. Fiaccadori, *Sembrouthes "gran re"* (DAE IV 3 = RIEth 275). *Per la storia del primo ellenismo axumita*, pp. 59 (2004),

2. Meropios

In the traditional story about the christianization of Ethiopia, the name of the teacher and guide of the two boys is always Meropios (*Me-/Mi-*) in the literary sources which call him by name, except the Synaxary, which has *Merobopyos*, which usually is taken as a mistake deriving from the Arabic text from which the Ethiopic was translated; for Greek *p* there was, in the corresponding Arabic text, as usual, a *b*. When the Ethiopian translator realized that his languages did in fact possess a *p*, inserted in the Ethiopic syllabary just for Greek or also Cushitic words) he corrected his text, by inserting this *p*, but without eliminating the already written *b*.¹³ But it can be observed that a *b* (without *p*) exists also in the tradition reported by the eeccegiè Filpos 704,¹⁴ which has *Marbeas*: partial stabilization of an "arabicizing" spelling or even tradition?¹⁵

3. "Azwägwä

The son of the aksumite king under whom the two boys lived and worked is called 'Ella 'Azwägwä in the Synaxary¹⁶ and in the homily on St. Frumentius edited by Getatchew Haile 1979: 317. This name, together with that of his father ('Ella 'Aladä) has always made some difficulties to the historians. But, whereas the name of 'Ēzānā's father in the inscriptions is 'Ella °Amidā, and thus the 'Ella 'Aladä of the Synaxary could be rightly explained by Conti Rossini 1922:18 as a corruption of the Greek ELLA AMIDA (with MI > LA possible in capital letters) the other, 'Ella 'Azwägwä has never received a satisfactory explanation; as the verb is in the plural (*wanagśu* "and they reigned") it has also been proposed a translation "Zague", the reading *Zagwä* being present in a part of the manuscript tradition - were it not that in this case it would be a matter of simple assonance, and, from the philological point of view, a very surprising *lectio facilior*¹⁷, not to speak of the fact that the Zague (ca. 1150 -1270) reigned about eight hundred years after the facts here in question. Also the other proposal by Conti Rossini, that 'Ella 'Azwägwä came (again through Greek capitals) from a 'Ella 'Azwä, in turn from 'Ella Aizana.¹⁸ It is also wise not to insist too much on such philological gymnastics, jumping from mistake to mistake like monkeys in a non-bédierian *silva portentosa*. In fact, it is surprising that nobody¹⁹ has ever mentioned the place name 'Axguaguä, which according to Paez in Beccari II 270 and Almeida in Beccari V 24 indicates a region of Angot, at the sources of the- Takkaze²⁰ - taking also into account the fact that place names seem to be sometimes employed in anthroponymy (cp. one of 'Ēzānā's brothers, Adafä, below, and the general Šaggä Krastos

134 (who in his insistent attacks against the present writer curiously speaks of "a precise colonial model" of the Sabaeans Kariba 'il Watar: how does we know that?), but also of Drewes 1998:128 fn. 1..

¹³ Or perhaps eliminating it, but with the usual not very clear sign in similar cases, i. e. two parallel strokes, one above the letter, and the other below. Given the not very good state of edition of the Ethiopian Synaxary we do not know if and how much this variant *b + p* was generalized.

¹⁴ Conti Rossini 1918.

¹⁵ The weakness of the articulation *p* in Ethiopic must also have played some role.

¹⁶ The variant *Zagwä* is of course of no value; see below.

¹⁷ Completely different from the word discussed above, which did not concern the subject, but the verb ("he made to reign" and "They reigned").

¹⁸ That the name of 'Ēzānā never appears, for the moment, with 'alla in his inscriptions is not very significant, because such an element must probably be felt as typical of the aksumite royal names.

¹⁹ But see my summary of the "Life" of Abrahā and Aṣḥā (Marrassini 1999: 176).

²⁰ Paez in Beccari II 270 ([the river Takkazē] *tem suas fontes muyto perto dos limites do reyno de Angôt, em huma terra que se chama 'Axguaguä, ao pé de hum alto monte que lhes fica a oriente ...*); Almeida in Beccari V 24 ([the river Takkazē] *tem sua fonte em huma terra, que se chama 'Axguaguä, no principio do reyno de Angôt, iunto a Begamderaonde ao pé de hum alto monte que lhe fica a oriente...*).

Bagamdər under king ʿAmda Šəyon²¹). The name of the king would then be an uncorrupted 'Ella 'Azg^wāg^wā ; as for the verb in the plural with a subject in the singular, quoted above, there is no question of modeling the first on the second, but the second on the first, by considering it a rest of the well known pre-aksumite and aksumite use of the "plural of respect" (on which see below). In this case the plural *wanagsū* (already, in itself, a *difficilior*) should be accepted in the text.

6. 'əlla

Speaking of this kind of personal names, something can be said about the element 'əlla, which frequently occurs in the aksumite royal names ('əlla *Alādā*, 'əlla 'Amidā, 'əlla 'Azg^wāg^wā, 'əlla *Ašbəha*, 'əlla *Gabaz*). After a phase in which it was interpreted as the name of the Semitic god El,²² one has passed,²³ thanks to the Greek legend on several coins, which bore a double *ll*, to the possibility of an Arabic-like article (which was improbable both chronologically and culturally, not to speak of the fact that the Arabic article does not show any double *ll*) or to a rendering of the South-Arabian and Arabic relative of appurtenance *du-* (but 'əllā is a plural, and *du-* is a singular). One could also think to the relative pronoun²⁴ and definite article of Tigre *la-*, but in the present writer's opinion this element 'əlla should not be anything else than the relative 'əllā, which in this form, or also 'ənnā, still today indicates in Amharic the retinue of some important personage,²⁵ and also the personage himself; it seems to be the same element found in Amharic in the plural forms of the independent personal pronoun *ənnantā*, *ənnässu* etc. Of course, in this plural can have had an important role also the use of the plural of respect usually found (although not always) in the aksumite inscriptions (see below). Altogether arbitrary the statement of Munro-Hay 1991: 159 and 162, that this would be an epitheton meaning "who that ...", that all the Ethiopian kings bore it, and that it had "religious implications".²⁶

7. The two ʿĒzānā

Some scholars are in favour of the presence of *two* kings whose name was ʿĒzānā (ʿĒzānā I, 4th c., and ʿĒzānā II, 6th c.). After the notes by Ryckmans 1955: 3 n. 7, Drewes 1962:87,²⁷ Pirenne 1975.

Drewes 2007. One has insisted mainly on palaeographic considerations, pointing out the difficulty of admitting that in few decades it has been possible to pass from "a consonantal writing to a syllabic writing of an evolved type"²⁸

Maybe one basic observation should be made, that of sharp *formal* separation between the inscriptions in south-arabian writing (frequently called "pseudo-sabaic" because of its artificial, too much ornamented, appearance), and those in ethiopian writing, without mixing the two types. Formal separation, not of functions, because all of them are (or are supposed to be) part of bilinguals which should tell more or less the same facts. At least judging from the so-called "trilingual inscription" (in fact, bilingual in three writings: DAE 4-6-7 = RIE 370 and 185 I and II, with duplicates), the "normal", basic inscription was that in south arabian characters (or even that in Greek, for a different public), and the true bilingual was that in Geez in south arabian characters - Greek; this is demonstrated by the fact that the inscription in Geez with ethiopian characters seems

²¹ Taddese Tamrat 1972: 192-3

²² Conti Rossini 1895: 22, following a hypothesis of J. Halévy.

²³ With Dillmann 1853: 352 n. 1, but also in part Conti Rossini.

²⁴ As already for Dillmann.

²⁵ So, it is probable that the second element would be a place name. A similar case could be that of Tigrinya *daqq(i)* followed by a place or ethnic name, in the sense of "the boys of", "those of".

²⁶ Another opinion in Lusini 2004: 70-71, according to whom this element could derive from a root **ly* and from a substantive "guardian" (*ʿel/le*).

²⁷ As usual, Drewes expresses himself too concisely, and he does not offer a clear conclusion; the continuation of his argument does not seem to have much to do with the problem of the "two ʿĒzānā", and limits himself to explain the similarity between the writings of DAE 7 and of the inscription of Gdr, and also to discuss the new theory of J. Pirenne, who put Gdr in the 3d century.

²⁸ Garbini 1979: 80-82 (but see already Dillmann 1878).

to have been added later, and had to be satisfied with utilizing the spaces left by the others;²⁹ or the inscriptions RIE 190 (Geez with Ethiopian characters) and 271 (Greek), which seem to have been part of a throne, in which the right side showed in the outer face the inscription RIE 190, and in the inner face the inscription RIE 271.³⁰ Because of the fact that the first inscription begins *ex-abrupto* (without even quoting the name of the king), and the second does not tell of any detail of the campaign against the Noba, it is generally assumed that both these missing parts were found in their original place, lost for the moment (the inscription RIE 189 = DAE 11, in vocalized Geez, which also speaks of an expedition against the Noba, probably also belonged to a throne, but without any physical connection with the preceding inscriptions).³¹

So, these inscriptions in Geez in Sabaic writing are a category, or even an epigraphic *genre*, by itself, with a long evolution from the 4th (RIE 186 = DAE 8) to the 6th c. (RIE 192), without much to do, from the formal point of view, with their counterparts; an Aksumite king "had to" write his deeds in Greek and in Geez, but this latter in the more prestigious South Arabian characters, like many Germans who prefer to write titles or "noble" texts in Gothic characters. So, these bilinguals were such from a point of view of the contents, not of the formal epigraphy, and to jump continuously from one type to another, inside the same king, only blurs the question, showing a bewildering alternance of progress (Ethiopian vocalized writing) and regress (Sabaic consonantal writing). In this way, instead, if we put aside the inscriptions in Sabaean writing, the evolution of the Ethiopian writing becomes much clearer, from an alphabet (without vowels) to a syllabary (with vowels), these latter perhaps developed under Greek (or even Indian) influence. Anyway, to speak of "too short" or "too long" times is senseless; also the times of palaeographical history are what they are.

8. The personal names in the (Greek) accusative

Some of the inscriptions have personal names in the accusative, with the regular Geez ending *-h(ā)*, e.g. one of the two ⁶Ezānā's brothers in RIE 185 I (=DAE 6, Geez in South Arabian writing) *Ṣ^cḏnh*; RIE 185 Ibis (its duplicate),³² RIE 185 II (=DAE 7, Geez in Ethiopian unvocalized writing) *ṣ^cznh*, RIE 185 Ibis (its duplicate) *ṣ^cznh* (all with the sign *z*). In the Greek corresponding versions³³ the accusative is sometimes indicated (duplicate RIE 270bis *Sazanān*), sometimes it is not (RIE 270 *Saizana*).

A particular case is that of the other brother of king ⁶Ezānā, whose name not only has the accusative ending in both Geez versions (*Ḥḏfh*;³⁴ so, one should not transcribe the name as "Ḥadefāhā" or "Ḥḏfh" as in Huntingford 1989:48 or Brakmann 1994: 27), and also, together with the article *tōn* (which is wanting in the other brother's name) in the Greek versions RIE 270: 9 and duplicate RIE 270bis: 9 *ton Adifan*. Now, the inscription RIE 192, by W^czb son of Kāleb, shows the expression *b's Ḥḏfh* referred to the king according to the well known royal formula "man of ...".³⁵ A place Adafā, in the neighborhood of Lalibela, is indicated by the "History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria" in 1210 as the capital of the Zagwe dynasty;³⁶ and it is also found in the "Life" of the Zagwe king Yāmrahanna Krastos.³⁷ Could this *-n* be a kind of crystallized "Greek accusative"? Note that the anthroponymy of the 6th century (limited as far as the number of the PN is concerned, but abundant in their documentation) is full not only of these "Greek" (?) *-n*, not always justified by a real position of accusative, but also of *-n* in Semitic texts (where of course there is not the possibility of a similar

²⁹ Cp. Sima 2003-4:281.

³⁰ That this Greek inscription was placed at the inside is demonstrated by the fact that it stops some tens of centimeters before the tenon, which is placed exactly inside.

³¹ See the short notices on the relevant inscriptions in RIE, and in Schneider 1996.

³² It must be made clear that the terms "original" and "duplicate" have no absolute meaning, being only due to the time of the discovery.

³³ According to Sima 2003-4, who speaks of the inscriptions RIE 185 (Geez) and 270 (Geez) with their duplicates, the true bilingual inscription, commemorating the military facts, was that in South Arabian characters, together with that in Greek, where the primary redaction was the first. The inscription in Ethiopian characters was added subsequently, by utilizing the spaces left.

³⁴ Cp. the discussion in Littmann 1913: 14-15.

³⁵ List in Munro-Hay 1991: 160.

³⁶ Taddese Tamrat 1972: 2:59 with fn. 5.

³⁷ Marrassini 1995: 80. From this point of view, the emendation from *ḥḏfh* into *ḥḏqn* proposed by Manzo RSE 39 1995 74-75 for this inscription is not strictly necessary.

justification altogether). For example the Abyssinian king 'alla 'Aṣḥa³⁸ ('l' < s > bh' in the South Arabian inscription Istanbul 7608bis = RES 3904), is Ellatzbāas, Ellesihēaios, Elesbāas, Elesbaās, Elesbaās, 'Elesbās, Elesbaā, in the Byzantine sources. including the *Martyrium Arethae*, but also *Elesbaan*, *Elesboam*, and in Armenian *Eghezbavam* (at least in part of the tradition); in the Portuguese, e. g. Paez (from Simeon Metaphrastes) in Beccari II 607 (*Elesbāo*) and 611 sgg. (*Elesbaam*), Almeida in Beccari V 153 and sgg., from Baronio (*Elesbaan*). The name of the Himyairte king was originally *Du-Nuwās* (and derived forms) in the tradition fixed in the Arabic area; in the literary texts is *Doynaās* in the Greek version of the *Martyrium Arethae*, *Dovnas* in the Armenian version, but *Doynaān* (in position of nominative in the text) in Nikephoros Kalliistos and Simeon Metaphrastes (here with a striking difference in cases: *Doynaān Ebraiōs*); *Dunaan* in Almeida in Beccari V, 153 ff. (from Baronio), 163 and *passim*. In the narrative of another war between Abyssinia and Himyar (a war which is probably the same as the preceding one, but told differently) the name of the himyarite king seems to be similar: *Damnus* in John of Nikiu, *Damianōs* in Teophanes the Confessor and in George Cedrenus, *Dāmnos* in Nikephoros Kalliistos. but in the Syriac texts is *Dymnwn* in the so-called "Chronicle of the Pseudo-Denis of Tell Mahre" (also called "Chronicle of Zuqnin").

LINGUISTICS

9. The "plural of respect"

About this "plural of respect" (improperly called by some *plurale majestatis*, which in fact applies itself to the 1st person only), it must be stressed that it is typical not only of the aksumite age (where, to be sure, it shows much inconsistency in the inscriptions), and that it disappears with the post-aksumite period (with very few, and doubtful, exceptions), but that it is clearly documented also in the Sabaic inscriptions on Ethiopian soil, which are present from the 8th c. B. C. onwards. A recent note by Alexander Sima (Sima 2002: 129-132)³⁹ looks for the origins of this usage strictly inside South-Arabian epigraphy, and suggests that its origin is to be found in the custom of co-regency, beginning with king 'bkrb 's^{3c}d (co-regent with his son Hs²n Yhn'm; inscr. Ry 509), at the beginning of the 5th c. A. D.. Sima notes that here the dual had to be employed (and the dual is in fact employed here in the substantive and the pronouns referring to the two kings), and in his opinion this seems to suggest that this usage was already fixed in a preceding period, when the co-regents were frequently more than two; here it can be observed that the explanation by Sima is similar to that of the ecclesiastical Filpos 705 for Ethiopic, who says that, in addressing the king, it was first employed with Abrahā e Aṣḥa,⁴⁰ because they were two; but Sima, strangely enough, does not take into consideration this Ethiopian pre-aksumite and aksumite usage, already present, as we

³⁸ The name is surely Semitic, from the root *ṣbh "to dawn" which exists, outside Ethiopic, also in Old South Arabian (more than 120 cases in Harding 1974: 365.), in Modern South Arabian and in Arabic. This root has produced in Ethiopia personal names like ṣabuh (passive participle, in two monograms of axumite age, from Eritrea, RIE 400 e 423), and this causative 'aṣḥa,³⁸ which is found also in the name of one of the two Abyssinian ambassadors who build a house in Zafār, in a South Arabian inscriptions dated under king Maṭṭad'ilān Yanūf (ca. 500-515), 619 him, and also in Pre-Islamic North-Arabian. The use of this name in non-regal texts makes highly improbable the proposal by Fiacadori in Berger 2006. 64 (repeated in EAe III, 2007:328; for a similar attitude (significantly following an etymology proposed for ESA by Conti Rossini) see his etymology of 'Ella Gabaz in EAe II 262, which in his opinion should come from *gbz "[tax] collector", instead from the right *gabaz* "treasure [of the cathedral of Aksum]"), that the name is derived from another root meaning "to collect tributes". It is truly amazing that, when some "Biblical" atmosphere is at work, every poor storehouse found by the archaeologist is immediately labeled as a temple; whereas, as soon as this "Biblical" atmosphere disappears, every (previously) sacred king becomes to the utmost a tax-agent (this is particularly evident in Ethiopian studies, thanks to the rampant positivism, so implacably attentive to the *histoire événementielle*). The form of the name seems to be absent from the Geez post-axumite texts, but it reappears today in Tigrinya, probably without real continuity, but only by derivation from the historical event; that it is a genuine Geez formation is demonstrated by the final -ha, which would be -he in Tigrinya would be -he.

³⁹ Cp. also Drewes 1991: 384-5, Sima 2003-4: 280. Quite independently from this latter problem, a continuous oscillation between singular and plural (especially in the collective nouns), is normal in Geez and even more in modern Ethiopian languages.

⁴⁰ Cp. in this connection the continuous oscillations between singular and plural pointed out in Marrassini 1999: 164.

have said before, in the *Sabaic* inscriptions of Ethiopia in the 8th c. B. C.,⁴¹ and absent from the inscriptions from South Arabia of the same period; disappeared from post-aksumite Geez, but re-emerging in the modern Ethiopian languages, in Amharic and above all in Tigrinya. This feature seems to be absent from the rest of Semitic.

10. The causative

In the inscription by the son of Kaleb, W^czb (RIE 192), in Geez written in south-arabian characters, the causative is in '(a)-, as usual in Geez, in 2 to 4 cases (l. 10 'ywh, l. 37 'grr, perhaps l. 24 'kry and l. 49 'gbnw), but there are 5 or 6 other cases in which the morpheme is h(a)- (l. 10 hgbr, l. 23 hšsr, l. 32 'hdm, l. 35 h'lt, l. 36 h'kt, perhaps l. 10 hq[dm?]) Face B line 10 hgšn). This is not a discovery, because these examples were already pointed out by Schneider in his *editio princeps* of 1974, but in a very modest (in keeping with his personality), but also a little hasty, way, and not repeated in his paper read at the GLECS in 1975 (Schneider 1973-9), although the readings were confirmed in RIE 1991. That it is at least opportune to recall this phenomenon is demonstrated by the simple fact that it is not recorded in the recent grammars of Geez,⁴² including the book on the verbal system by Weninger⁴³ and some introductory outlines,⁴⁴ and in Semitic.⁴⁵ From the phonological point of view, to this type of causative with h- instead of -' should be added the h- which appears, according to Schneider 1973-9, in the personal independent pronoun III m. s. h't (l. 4) = Tigre hātu, instead of Geez wə'atu, and hmnt (l. 9) instead of Geez 'amuntu.⁴⁶ Of course there is nothing to be surprised with a phenomenon like that: h- is he causative in OSA and of part of the MSA, and in general of the chronologically "middle" stages of Semitic (Hebrew, part of Aramaic and of Arabic). Perhaps an encouragement for further research could come from the present situation of Tigre itself, where equally this phenomenon is not pointed out,⁴⁷ including the long article by Raz on the Tigre verb (Raz 1980), but which equally shows many verbal forms beginning with ha-, that in my opinion could be interpreted as archaic causatives. In the first 28 pages of the Tigre dictionary by Littmann-Höfner (LH 1962), containing the letter h, there are about forty verbal forms showing the pattern ha-12a3a (or ha-1a21a2a, e. g. harakraka "to hurry [without sense]" LH 11), which strongly resembles that of the "normal" 'a- causative, plus another ten with different verbal thematoplus another fifteen or so, with a prefix han- which is difficult to separated from the well known Semitic 'an,⁴⁸ which in turn seems to show, contrary to this, an original 'alef.

The only interesting element could be the presence of a dialect (and a typologically Tigré-like - or South Arabian-like - dialect) of Geez, which could at last put to an end the apparent, and unistorical, granitic aspect of this language.

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⁴¹ Schneider 1961: 63 (singular and plural); Schneider 1965: 222x2 (singular and plural); Schneider 1971-2: 24; Schneider 1973: 386x2; Schneider, 1976: 85x2 (plural instead of dual, a phenomenon in itself of universal presence); cp. also Drewes 1959: 92 (singular instead of plural).

⁴² Lambdin 1978; Tropper 2002; Weninger 1993 (2nd ed. 1999).

⁴³ Weninger 2001.

⁴⁴ For example those of R. Hetzron and M. L. Bender, *The Ethio-Semitic languages*, in: M. L. Bender - J. D. Bowen - R. L. Cooper - C. A. Ferguson (eds.), *Language in Ethiopia*, London 1976, 23-34, and M. L. Bender - Hailu Fulass - R. Cowley, *Two Ethio-Semitic languages*, *ibid.* 99-119 [geez and tigrinya], or G. B. Gragg, *Ge'ez (Ethiopic)*, in: R. Hetzron (ed.), *The Semitic languages*, London 1997, 242-260

⁴⁵ Cp. for example B. Kienast, *Historische semitische Sprachwissenschaft*, Wiesbaden 2001, 210 (I am not been able to consult E. Lipinski, *The Semitic languages. Outline of a comparative grammar*, Leuven 1997).

⁴⁶ Here we can add Tigre 'atom.

⁴⁷ Cf. Leslau 1945 and Sh. Raz, *Tigre grammar and texts* (Afroasiatic dialects 4), Malibu 1983 (and cp. Sh. Raz, *Source materials for the study of the Tigre language*, in: S. Segert - A. Bodrogligeti (eds.), *Ethiopian studies dedicated to Wolf Leslau ...*, Wiesbaden 1983, 307-322). No hint to the causative in the lemma *Haka na Dahālik*, by M. C. Simeone-Senelle, in *EAE II* (2005) 70-71.

⁴⁸ Cf. Conti 1980.

⁴⁹ Unfortunately, a short etymological survey proved to be of no practical utility: only one case in common with Geez (Te. *hadamdama* "to come unexpectedly" LH 25; Ge. *'adamdama* "cause to be astonished or stupefied" L 133), only four with Tigrinya (Te. *halfafa* "inf. invitation to chat" L H 5, Tna. *'alfafa* "to cause to chat" K 146; Te. *haratrata* "to move about fussily" LH 11, Tna. *'aratrata* "to send at a trot" K 569; Te. *harakraka* "tu hurry [without reason]" LH 11, Tna. *'arakraka* "to cause to enter by force" K 582; perhaps Te. *harfafa* "to become blunt" LH 12, Tna. *'arfafa* "to finish off" K 616).

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