

Comparative Semitic Studies: *status quaestionis*

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In 1962 as an undergraduate student I prepared a seminar paper which consisted of a summary and a discussion of the collection of papers which had been edited by Giorgio Levi Della Vida (1961) under the famous title "Linguistica Semitica : Presente e Futuro". The volume contained papers by some of the most distinguished Semitists of that time, namely von Soden, Cazelles, Spitaler, Cerulli, Levi Della Vida who passed away and of two scholars who are still alive: Ullendorf and Garbini. In my juvenile paper I tried to keep as close as possible to the opinions and conclusions of the original authors but nevertheless I was criticised by my teacher Rev. Prof. Aleksy Klawek who was a great Polish Biblical scholar, for being too general, rather superficial and uncritical. I think that his criticism had a positive influence on me. The question is, however, whether this influence has been more or less permanent. After so many years I have been asked by prof. del Olmo to present my own miniature 'Linguistica Semitica Comparata – Presente e Futuro' in the presence of colleagues of whom several could accomplish the same task in a similar or even a much more satisfactory way. It is inevitable that once again I am going to be too general and rather superficial first of all because a mission to present *status quaestionis* of comparative Semitic studies in some twenty-odd minutes is an impossible mission – mission impossible ! But after all it may be useful to have a very short overview at least to start a discussion even if it is impossible to touch all the most important problems. Of course I have to do it rather 'im Telegraphstil' as Germans and Poles, probably also others used to say when telegraph was still in use not so many years ago.

Actually we have already had good overviews which appeared after a conference held in Jerusalem in Israel Oriental Studies 2002. See especially John Huehnergard's contribution on comparative Semitic linguistics (pp. 119-150) which can be supplemented by other articles he has authored (1995, 1996; cf. Zaborski 1998b).

Rather numerous congresses and conferences have been organised since 1960. International Congresses of Hamitosemitic Linguistics held in different European countries had a long break after Vienna and Moscow but finally the tradition has been revived and we had the seventh congress in September 2004 in Berlin. Italian scholars have played a very important part regularly and frequently organising their increasingly international conferences which have finally developed into truly international events. North American Conferences on Afroasiatic Linguistics initiated by Robert Hetzron have been continued although their impact has been rather limited because, following a bad new practice, NACAL has never published any proceedings. Apart from the more or less schismatic and isolationist Afroasiatic conferences organised by a group of French scholars concentrating rather on linguistics than on languages and apart from a good conference organised in Fes in 1997 there have been other events which could be mentioned only in a systematic historical sketch.

In any case the present conference in this fantastic city of Barcelona and this important Semitist centre developed by Prof. del Olmo has not only a good historical background but may play quite a positive part in the development of our discipline.

As is well known, new Semitic languages and dialects have been discovered since 1960 and many new texts in already known languages and dialects have been collected and published. Non-Semitic languages of the Hamitosemitic/Afroasiatic family, viz. Berber, Cushitic, Egyptian and Chadic languages (I exclude the alleged 'Omotic' branch since some of the so-called 'Omotic' languages are West Cushitic and some are not Hamitosemitic at all, see Zaborski 2004) have been more and more used for a better comparative elucidation of the Semitic branch although this use has still been much too limited. Hamitosemitic linguistics can be compared to Indoeuropean linguistics but although we have Indoeuropean linguistics curricula at most universities, there is nothing comparable in case of Hamitosemitic linguistics so that we still lack systematically trained Hamitosemitists, viz. linguists having a satisfactory knowledge of all the branches and of the main languages. As I wrote years ago, it is obvious that e.g. Germanic linguistics cannot be isolated from non-Germanic branches of Indoeuropean and a good Germanist must know e.g. Greek and Sanscrit, but Semitists still largely neglect other archaic Hamitosemitic languages like Berber, Beja, 'Afar, Saho and even Egyptian. Unfortunately Petráček's great discussion of the history and the current state of Hamitosemitic linguistics remains practically unknown as his "Introduction to Hamitosemitic Linguistics" has appeared posthumously only in the Czech version (1989).

After 1961 the first collection of short syntheses and overviews (of unequal value !) of the Semitic languages appeared in 1988 (with a very serious delay !) edited by David Cohen whose general chapter on Hamitosemitic and several other texts have remained a bit underestimated. It was followed by a large collection (many of them reprints of earlier publications) by Soviet scholars (1991) in which the introductory chapter by I.M. Diakonoff being the last version of his famous synthesis of Hamitosemitic is especially important. As far as syntheses are concerned, Grande's 'A Grammar of Arabic in a Comparative-Historical Perspective' (1963) and his 'Introduction into Comparative Study of the Semitic Languages' (1972; cf. Zaborski 1996) contain some interesting insights but because of the author's tragic fate in the Soviet times they were dated already at the time of their appearance. It is regrettable that E. Lipiński's 'Outline' (first edition 1997, second edition 2001) which actually amounts to a rather plagiarizing compilation full of errors, distortions and lacunae has been considered by some uncritical persons as a kind of *summa linguisticae semiticae*. Kienast's 'Historical Semitic Linguistics' (2001) has been rather underestimated –as a synthetic treatment it also contains a number of errors and obsolete ideas but it has more positive features and, at least, it makes it clear where do the errors and strange ideas come from because the author, unlike Lipiński, does systematically quote his sources and all the relevant publications. The sketch published by Stempel (1999) is better than the 1964 "Introduction" by Moscati and Co., but it rather polishes traditional tenets of comparative Semitics than provides new solutions and new ideas. In any case it is clear that a new 'Grundriss' to replace Brockelmann (1908-1913) after a century is badly needed. The collection of general papers and introductions edited by Robert Hetzron (1997, cf. Voigt 1999) contains contributions of very unequal level which makes the volume only sometimes useful for 'grown-up' Semitists and frequently useless for beginners or for linguists working on other language families. Kuryłowicz's 'Studies in Semitic Grammar and Metrics' (1972) which should be always read together with its first version entitled 'L'apophonie en sémitique' (1962) remains a splendid collection of original ideas and insights as well as great analyses although it suffers from its very condensed and consequently sometimes rather obscure style. For advanced beginners the original 'Einführung....' by Bergsträsser (1928) is still the best reading which has not become totally overshadowed by P. Daniel's modernised new edition while for real beginners Moscati's otherwise hypercautious and far

too selective 'Introduction' (1964) must be recommended since the very best book for beginners, viz. Huehnergard 2002 is actually a kind of not generally accessible preprint. I should strongly recommend a publication of Huehnergard's "Introduction". Bennet's workbook is a good supplement indeed. On the other hand Garbini and Durand (1994) have been rather disappointing.

We have had very few synthetic treatments of the particular branches of Semitic with some notable exceptions like Hetzron's book (1972) on Ethiosemitic which must be read with comments by G. Goldenberg (1977) and Corriente's "Introduccion" (1996) which has not only a remarkable didactic value.

Phonology is a really well developed section of comparative Semitics but we need more combined phonological and etymological studies like A. Dolgopolskiy's 'From ...' (1999). The reconstruction of Proto-Semitic phonological system is rather well established. It is sad that some Semitists still do not understand that [p] and [f] have been simply variants of the same phoneme. As far as the prehistoric pronunciation of the 'emphatics' is concerned, it cannot be denied that the ejective/glottalized articulation did exist but personally I do not think that we can reasonably assume that this was the only original articulation. I think that already in the oldest period that can be reconstructed 'emphatics' had both ejective/glottalized and other, mainly pharyngealized and/or velarized variants/allophones.

In the field of morphology we have a good synthesis on the root by del Olmo 2003. At the same time we have had cases of revival (with a neglect of 'Forschungsgeschichte' !) of uncritical reconstructions of biradical roots, e.g. by G. Bohas (2000, cf. Zaborski 2002b). Kuryłowicz's (1962 and 1972) discussion of the origin and development of Ablaut/Apophony or internal inflection is still the best although Petráček's monograph (1960-1964) should not be neglected not only because of the author's derivational approach but also thanks to his Hamitosemitic perspective. The new synthesis of 'Nominalbildung' by Fox (2002) does not fully eliminate classical Barth (1894) but it has marked a progress. Pronouns have been studied by several scholars (cf. Ibriszimow, Segerer 2004) but a new synthesis of 'Pronominalbildung' to replace Barth (1913) is still to be done. As far as categories of number are concerned, I think that the idea that internal or apophonic plurals are simply innovations of South Semitic must be finally abandoned not only because these plurals have cognates in all (including Egyptian !) branches of Hamitosemitic (Ratcliffe 1998). I do not think that it makes sense to reduce triptotic declension in singular to diptotic one. Both triptotic and diptotic declensions are to be reconstructed for Proto-Semitic and most probably for a part of Proto-Hamitosemitic dialects. Attempts to reconstruct ergative construction for Proto-Semitic have not been convincing (see Zaborski 1999b) although, naturally enough, some more or less optional ergative features did exist in the prehistoric period. Prefixed definite article going back to demonstrative and inflected for person and number, perhaps even for case must be reconstructed for Proto-Semitic (see Zaborski 2000) in which it had already ousted its suffixed predecessor, viz. mimation/nunation which has been shifted in Classical Arabic to the indefinite function.

Both aspect and tense should be reconstructed for Proto-Semitic in spite of the fact that the traditional synchronic (sic !) analysis of the Classical Arabic verbal system shows (see Kuryłowicz 1973) that aspect and tense cannot be differentiated in the binary system of this dialect of Arabic (this has been misunderstood by Stempel 1999, see Zaborski 1995). Not only Akkadian Present *iparras/iparras-u* (with *-u* surviving in dependent clauses also in other verbal forms and acquiring a synchronic status of the marker of 'Subjunctive'/'Subordinative', see Zaborski forthcoming c) has cognates e.g. in numerous Classical Arabic *yuqattil-u/yuqātil-u* forms which are neither causative nor intensive but have the same meaning as their *yaqtVl-u* forms. Also Akkadian Perfect *iptaras* has cognates in Classical Arabic *iqtatala* (< *itqatala*) verbs many of which do not have a (medio)passive meaning at all but have the same meaning as their Class I counterparts (Zaborski 2004a). Not only a Present with the gemination of the second radical consonant and its variant with the long *-ā-* (surviving in Modern South Arabian and in Beja, see Zaborski 1997a and 1994) before it, have to be reconstructed at least for Proto-Semitic and for Proto-

Berber (as promoted especially by O. Röessler) but also *taqattala and *taqātala variants which all coexist in Berber Present/Intensive Aorist/Habitual (see Zaborski, forthcoming g). According to my hypothesis (Zaborski, 2002a and forthcoming a), derived verbal forms are, from a historical point of view, mainly remnants of the original independent, later more or less lexicalized, verbal forms with gemination (and its phonologically conditioned variant, viz. lengthening of the preceding vowel resulting in *-ā-*) and of periphrastic forms with original auxiliary verbs *nV (still used as 'to be' in Beja and in 'Afar-Saho) *ta 'to be(come)', (perhaps etymologically related to Arabic 'atā 'to come') and *sa/ša/ha/'a 'to make, to cause' (Zaborski 1999a and 2001b). As far as the so-called suffix conjugations are concerned, the standard theory is that West Semitic Perfect goes back to a form continued by Akkadian Stative which has a cognate in the Berber suffix conjugation of the 'verbs of quality'. Actually there has been no proof that the West Semitic Perfect must have had its origin in a Stative. In my opinion (Zaborski 2001b, cf. Voigt 2003 and Müller 1998) at least four 'suffix conjugations' or rather 'tenses' go back to Proto-Semitic: Stative (grammaticalized in Akkadian, yet not grammaticalized in West Semitic), *-k-* Perfect (e.g. in Ethiosemitic, in at least a part of 'Epigraphic' South Arabian, in Modern South Arabian and some 'Yemenite' Arabic dialects, see Zaborski 1994b), *-t-* Perfect (in other West Semitic languages and dialects) and a Gerund (grammaticalised in Ethiosemitic and in Aramaic, not grammaticalised elsewhere in Semitic, well grammaticalised and developed in Egyptian). The famous 'classical' hypothesis by Zimmern and Nöldeke explains only how *-k-* and *-t-* Perfects could merge but it is not a compulsory solution. It is remarkable that there are leading Egyptologists who reconstruct two Egyptian "Pseudo-Participles": one corresponding to Akkadian (and Berber !) stative and another one corresponding to West Semitic Perfect (or Gerund?). In this way the gap between Egyptian and Semitic verbal systems becomes considerably narrower.

Comparative syntax is still rather underdeveloped although we have a remarkably good monograph by G. Khan (1988).

As far as comparative lexicon is concerned, the writing, editing and publishing of David Cohen's *Dictionnaire de racines semitiques* (1970-) is progressing slowly and in spite of some sharp criticism of its first fascicles it has greatly improved indeed. But we still lack a good compendious comparative and etymological dictionary. Leslau's *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez* (1987) (originally to be called 'Etymological' !) has become a very powerful rival of the dictionaries of Hebrew which usually contained comparative data and had to be used, *faute de mieux*, as sources of comparative lexical data. New approach to basic lexical fields was initiated by P. Fronzaroli and a few years ago Kogan and Militarev have published (2000) the first installment of their project of a Semitic etymological dictionary. A systematic comparative treatment of the vast Arabic lexicon is still a desideratum.

As far as the genetic classification of Semitic languages is concerned, we have to remember that practically isoglosses must be contradictory in case of every group of closely related languages and dialects. Contradictory isoglosses make a clear-cut classification of such languages impossible but the fact remains that some languages are clearly related more closely than other languages and dialects. Already in 1991 I argued that we have quite visible traces of a dialect continuum in the case of Arabic dialects (Classical Arabic being only one of them, albeit culturally the most important one) having good links both with North West Semitic (obviously including Ugaritic) in the North and with South Semitic in the South. And South Semitic did have some common features with Akkadian and also with Aramaic. Therefore Semitic languages must have originally formed a dialect continuum within the Proto-Hamitosemitic dialect cluster. The genetic classification of Proto-Semitic within Proto-Hamitosemitic is a bit easier since Semitic, Berber and Cushitic make a group having 'prefix conjugations' which are absent in Egyptian and, as it seems so far, also in Chadic. But it is not so easy (cf. Zaborski 1997b) to say whether Berber or Cushitic is closer to Semitic. E.g. 'Afar-Saho verbal system is especially close to West Semitic preserving

also endings like *-u, en/-em* < *an and even Beja has an important isogloss, viz. Present and Intensive with long vowel which is a link with Modern South Arabian (Zaborski forthcoming b).

Diagnosis: comparative Semitics is a well developed and still developing discipline whose further progress has been threatened to some extent by recent drop of interest in major comparative studies as well as by unfortunate financial cuts at German universities where Semitics has been facing drastic reductions together with other valuable and indispensable 'Orchideenfächer'. My proposal: 1. A special journal devoted to comparative Hamitosemitic/Afroasiatic linguistics should be published in order to continue the two pioneer journals ('Afroasiatic Linguistics' and 'Journal of Afroasiatic Languages') initiated and edited by Robert Hetzron, 2. This journal should have "Supplements" series dealing with particular problems of Hamitosemitic comparison as well as presenting new data.

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