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A Neglected Ethiopian Contribution to Semitic and Afroasiatic Reconstruction

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0. Introduction

In section 1 of this paper I will describe a prominent feature of Ethiopian Semitic languages, their lexical classes of verb roots, termed A-type and B-type, which make up the large majority of verb roots of the languages. Perhaps more than any other features of Semitic and Afroasiatic languages, this pair of verb classes appears to present evidence for two somewhat controversial features of the reconstructed Semitic and Afroasiatic verbal system: a formally expressed distinction of active or transitive verbs versus stative or intransitive verbs, and a present/imperfect verb stem marked by consonant length. In section 2 I will briefly review the basic evidence for these two features, and show how, nevertheless, because the Ethiopian Semitic (henceforward ES) B-type has been considered to be a development of the Semitic derived intensive formation seen in Arabic, Afroasiatic and Semitic, reconstruction has proceeded without appreciation of the Ethiopian Semitic A/B-type dichotomy. Finally, in the third section, I will suggest reasons why this very prominent ES characteristic has been ignored, and will show some ways that it can contribute importantly to reconstruction.

1. A and B-type in ES

Following are 3m.sg. forms of a pair of typical A and B-type triconsonantal verbs, in the past, present, and jussive conjugations in three ES languages: Ge'ez, Amharic, and Harari.

(1) A and B-type verbs in Ethiopian Semitic (3m.sg. forms)

Language	Root	Type	Past	Present	Jussive
Ge'ez	<i>sbr</i> 'break'	A	<i>səbərə</i>	<i>yī-səbbir</i>	<i>yī-sbər</i>
	<i>mzn</i> 'weigh'	B	<i>məzzənə</i>	<i>yī-mezzin</i>	<i>yī-mezzin</i>
Amharic	<i>sbr</i> 'break'	A	<i>səbbərə</i>	<i>yī-səbr</i>	<i>yī-sbər</i>
	<i>mzn</i> 'weigh'	B	<i>məzzənə</i>	<i>yī-məzzin</i>	<i>yī-məzzin</i>
Harari	<i>sbr</i> 'break'	A	<i>səbərə</i>	<i>yī-səbri</i>	<i>yə-sbər</i>
	<i>mzn</i> 'weigh'	B	<i>məezənə</i>	<i>yī-miizni</i>	<i>yə-meezni</i>

The A and B-type verb classes appear in all the ES languages (eleven to thirteen, depending on how dialect continua within the so-called Gurage languages are counted). Two formal characteristics distinguish the types: a front vowel *e* (in Harari *ee > ii*) after the first root consonant of some verb forms, and lengthening of the second consonant in all forms of languages that have long consonants. The vowel characteristic appears in only some forms of some ES languages (for example, Ge'ez and Chaha), appears uniformly in some (including Tigrinya and Harari), and is uniformly absent in others (including Amharic and Tigre). The characteristic appears to have been original in the present (or imperfect) stems, from

which it was extended to past (or perfect) forms in some of the languages (Hetzron 1972: 23-26). The long consonant characteristic appears throughout ES except in those languages which have undergone a sound change of degemination. (Since Ge'ez has been equated with Proto-ES (Ullendorff 1960: 129), it should be mentioned that this language, while the earliest recorded ES language, by a thousand years, has apparently no descendant among the modern languages, and deserves only slight priority as evidence in reconstruction (Hetzron 1972: 19-21).)

Notice in (1) that A and B types are merged in the Amharic perfect, in which roots of both types form stems of the pattern CVC:VC, without the front vowel and with a long second C. In the other forms and in the perfect of most of the other languages, the A/B-type dichotomy is prominent throughout ES, and always there is no apparent correlation of meaning with the formal distinction of types, which is thus a strictly lexical distinction --that is, one which must be marked in the lexicon for each simple triconsonantal verb root (by far the most common root-type in ES as throughout Semitic), and also for biconsonantal roots with triconsonantal etymologies in which the second root consonant survives. Being fully present and prominent throughout ES, the lexical characteristic of A and B types certainly must be reconstructed for the group.

The absence of a meaning correlate of the B-type is not recognized or admitted by earlier grammars of ES languages. Dillmann (1907: 143-6) equated the Ge'ez B-type to the Arabic derived so-called form 2, generally an intensive or causative. That there are almost no Ge'ez basic (A-type) verbs also forming B-types Dillman attributed to 'frugality displayed in the housekeeping of forms'. Conti Rossini (1941 [1967: 40]), in the Ge'ez grammar perhaps most commonly used as a textbook for the language, says the B-type indicates 'intensity of action' and the transitive of an A-type, and he mentions some of the very rare cases for which this seems so, including root *mśl* A-type 'seem' and B-type 'compare', and root *mtr* A-type 'amputate' and B-type 'amputate completely'. Concerning the A/B-type dichotomy in Amharic, Cohen (1936: 201) says 'the ancient intensive value of the B type is reflected in diverse facts': A-types are 'generally active and "neuter"', while B-types are 'generally active', and he too mentions some of the rare roots which form both types, such as *t'bg*, with A-type 'be tight' and B-type 'guard, protect'. Perhaps Leslau (1936: 93) was first to correctly identify the B-type throughout ES as a lexical variant without regular semantic value; but he too considered it historically a derived form, cognate with Arabic form 2.

2. Semitic and Afroasiatic Reconstruction

Following is a presentation of Arabic and Akkadian comparisons with the data of (1), followed by a survey, in broad terms, of present reconstruction of the Proto-Semitic and Afroasiatic verbal systems.

2.1. Arabic

The structure of classical or standard Arabic is so relatively regular and elegant that early in the history of comparative linguistics this Semitic language strongly influenced or even determined the European conception of the Semitic language type. Fifty years ago Goetze (1942: 2) wrote that:

'In earlier days of Semitic research the belief was universal that Arabic, in which both vowels and consonants are so well preserved, is the most archaic among the

Semitic languages and particularly close to the common mother tongue. In such circumstances it was a foregone conclusion that not only the individual forms ...but also the general scheme of which they form part was inherited from Primitive Semitic'.

This tendency, if it persists, is not so strong in Semitic historical linguistics today, and certainly the trend has long been to broaden the basis of comparison within Semitic to include ES and, more recently, even, to consider non-Semitic Afroasiatic evidence.

The essential Arabic comparisons with (1) are presented in (2), for active and stative root 3m.sg. forms of the basic (form 1) suffixed past and prefixed present, and form 2 also in the past and present.

(2) Arabic basic verb morphology (3m.sg. forms)

Root	Form 1 perfect	Form 1 imperfect	Form 2 perfect	Form 2 imperfect
<i>ktb</i> 'write'	<i>katab-a</i>	<i>ya-ktub-u</i>	<i>kattib-a</i>	<i>yu-kattib-u</i>
<i>krm</i> 'be generous'	<i>karum-a</i>	<i>ya-krum-u</i>	<i>karrim-a</i>	<i>yu-karrim-u</i>

Notice the characteristic long consonant of form 2 stems.

Form 1 is basic and form 2 is considered derived. Often termed an intensive, as in *kassara* 'he smashed' from *kasara* 'he broke', form 2 as often yields a simple causative, as in *ʕallama* 'he taught' from *ʕalama* 'he learned'. In fact, the tendency is slight for a productive regular derivative to be expressed by the form (Goetze 1942: 2-3).

Formally speaking, the ES perfect is a good comparison with the Arabic basic perfect, with stem of form CVCVC, and the ES jussive with the Arabic present of form y V-CCVC. The ES B-type has always been compared with Arabic form 2 (Hebrew *piel*), both with imperfect form y V-CVC:VC. I have mentioned how earlier ES grammarians have supposed the B-type to be a derived intensive or development of a derived intensive. It seems apparent that this notion is the result entirely of an attempt to make sense of the ES facts in terms of the Arabic (or Hebrew) model.

But an opposite interpretation would seem just as reasonable --and moreso, perhaps, if the crusades had been fought in Ethiopia instead of the Arab Mediterranean world. That is, Arabic form 2 may be understood as a development of a lexical type still prominent in ES, reduced by analogical leveling in favor of the more basic type, and reinterpreted, presumably on the basis of a resulting semantic tendency or on the basis of a few prominent verbs in which the relation could be seen as derived, often as an intensive, from the basic type.

2.2. Akkadian

When Akkadian came to European awareness as the result of archaeological discoveries and the eventual decipherment of its cuneiform writing system after about 1875, this Semitic language would at first have little initial effect on the Arabicized conception already fixed. Though undeniably old (documentation is extensive from as early as 4000 years ago), Akkadian must at first have been accorded minimal consideration as evidence for Proto-Semitic because of, first, the

established belief, based upon the Bible stories so influential then and reinforced by the Akkadian documents themselves, that Assyria-Babylonia had been a land of extreme multilingualism, 'a great mixture of races and languages [where] it was accordingly that the scene of the confusion of tongues was laid' (Sayce 1880: 3), and second, the fact that its writing system was not Semitic but Sumerian.

The verbal system of Akkadian showed an imperfect set of comparisons with Arabic, as in (3) (from Rössler 1950 [1981: 696-98]), which shows 3m.sg. forms of one root in the so-called stative (with subject suffixes in other persons), the prefixed present, the prefixed preterite, and the prefixed present intensive 'D-form'.

(3) Akkadian basic verb morphology (3m.sg. forms)

Root	Stative	Present	Preterite	Present intensive
<i>kšd</i> 'conquer'	<i>kašid</i>	<i>i-kaššad</i>	<i>i-kšud</i>	<i>u-kaššad</i>

Here, a number of details must be omitted concerning such barely sufficient examples. But the essential formal comparisons are clear, up to a point: the ES A-type perfect and Arabic perfect with the Akkadian stative (CVCVC); ES A-type jussive and Arabic present with Akkadian preterite ((y)V-CCVC); the ES present with the Akkadian present, with their characteristic long consonants ((y)V-CVC:VC); and the Akkadian intensive with the Arabic intensive. Both the simple present stem and the intensive show the long root-second consonant.

An important point not apparent in (3) is that 'the stative remains outside any system that makes action and tense its basic categories' (Goetze 1942: 4). While an Akkadian root may appear in both the stative and preterite, like *kšd* 'conquer' in (3), this is often not the case (Goetze 1942: 4; Rössler 1950 [1981]: 698). It is convenient in (3) that a single root exemplify the forms, as typically and equally misleadingly often in the grammars, but this result is untypical. Stative roots have stative forms in preference to present and preterite forms (as seems reasonable, since a state perfected in the past is also present), whereas active roots have both the prefixed present and preterite (both are needed since an action in the past, being punctual, is not present). The Akkadian stative appears to be an essentially nominal conjugation, with its pronominal suffixes perhaps originally a nominal sentence (Buccellati 1968, 1988, Huehnergard 1987).

When Akkadian cuneiform was barely deciphered and Akkadian grammar barely understood, already Haupt (1878) rejected the conventional wisdom of his time 'that Assyrian is ... a corrupt branch of the Semitic family of speech' (245). Haupt claimed priority of age for the Akkadian-type verbal system over the Arabic: 'The Assyrian [Akkadian] Present (*iqátal*) and the Ethiopic Imperfect (*yegátel*) are no new formations, but the oldest verbal forms of the Semitic family of speech' (246). Notice that Haupt was unaware, even, of the long second consonant shared by Ge'ez and Akkadian in this form. His argument, it seems, was not widely accepted (cf. Moscati, et al.: 1964) and, generally, the issue lay dormant until the fifties, when Rössler (1950) presented his reconstruction based on a survey of Afroasiatic as well as Semitic verbal morphology, again attributing shared archaicism to Akkadian and Ge'ez. Rössler emphasized (i) the formal identity of Akkadian and Ge'ez presents with long second consonant, (ii) the two 'past' conjugations of Akkadian, prefixed and suffixed, which represent conjugations of different roots, so that this system shows a lexical dichotomy not present in Arabic

and not derivable from it, and (iii) apparent cognates of this dichotomy in South Arabian, Berber, and Cushitic languages. Later, Greenberg (1952) too argued for the Afroasiatic basis and historical identity of the Akkadian and ES A-type present of form (y)V-CVC:VC, and of the Akkadian preterite, Arabic present, and Ge'ez jussive of form (y)V-CCVC. Leslau (1953) countered-argued, noting that gemination is typically absent in the A-type of Amharic and other southern ES languages, and might be secondary elsewhere in ES. (Hetzron (1972: 23) reviews the ES evidence and arguments.)

2.3. Ethiopian Semitic

Even more than Akkadian, Ethiopian Semitic languages other than Ge'ez were latecomers to the consciousness of European Semiticists. Ge'ez, indeed, was known to Semiticists before Akkadian, but the early standard Ge'ez grammar of Dillmann (1857 [1907: 3]) suggested and probably fixed in the minds of generations of European Semiticists the notion that migrations of Semites from Yemen had brought Semitic languages to Ethiopia, a speculation which became thoroughly established when Sabaen South Arabian inscriptions in northern Ethiopia were published in the 1920s. As Akkadian was assumed to be corrupted by Sumerian, so the ES languages were assumed to be corrupted by Cushitic languages. (Indeed, while Cushitic influence may be apparent in ES syntax and lexicon, evidence of morphological influence is less certain, and to interpret seeming Cushiticisms in ES as representing persistence of Afroasiatic features, in both groups, seems to me often as reasonable.)

The essential facts of ES verbal morphology presented in (1) and comparable with (2) and (3) lack a semantic parallel to the Arabic and Akkadian so-called intensives. In fact, there is a reduplicative derived intensive verb in ES formed in triconsonantals by copying the medial consonant of the root forward, followed by the vowel *a* (though the formation is not known in Ge'ez), as in the following Amharic examples:

(4) Amharic intensive (3m.sg. forms)

Root	Type	Past	Present
<i>sbr</i> 'break'	A	<i>səbabbər-ə</i>	<i>yī-səbabbir</i>
<i>flg</i> 'seek'	B	<i>fəlalləg-ə</i>	<i>yī-fəlallig</i>

The meanings of the forms of (4) are 'smash' from 'break' and 'seek here and there' from 'seek(/want)'. The form is sometimes called a 'frequentative' (Leslau 1936: 111). Such a universally expected sort of derivation of an intensive by reduplication is, indeed, prevalent in Cushitic Ethiopian languages, including Kemant Agaw: *käl-* 'break' / *käläkäl-* 'shatter' (Appleyard 1975: 330), and Sidamo: *kad-* 'kick' / *kakkad-* (<*kadkad-*) 'kick repeatedly' (Hudson 1976: 272). The apparent absence of this form in Ge'ez is interesting, and might argue that the form is not, indeed, Semitic, but borrowed in other ES languages from Cushitic, an interpretation countered by the fact that the particular pattern of reduplication of (4) is otherwise common and reconstructible ES, and is not in any straightforward or borrowable way related to the simpler Cushitic pattern of doubling of a biconsonantal stem.

2.4. Non-Semitic Afroasiatic Languages

Other Afroasiatic languages contribute considerable evidence for characteristics of consonant length in the present-tense verb and a lexical dichotomy of stative and active (or intransitive and transitive: Diakonoff (1965: 78ff). Berber and Cushitic, particularly, illustrate the former characteristic, and Cushitic languages the latter. Rössler (1950), Greenberg (1952), and Diakonoff (1965) presented such evidence in support of their respective conclusions that the characteristics are not just Semitic but Afroasiatic.

Greenberg mentioned an array of evidence from Berber, Cushitic, Chadic and Egyptian for an Afroasiatic present tense characteristic of gemination, and Rössler mentioned evidence from these same groups (just Beja of Cushitic) for two conjugations distinguishing two semantic groups of verbs. Recently, Voigt (1987) added new comparisons to the Cushitic and Chadic evidence for an Afroasiatic formal distinction between geminating and nongeminating prefixed conjugations. Cushitic languages often show relics of the Afroasiatic prefix conjugation (Beja, Somali, Saho, Southern Agaw). Verbs of a closed class are conjugated with prefixes, and verbs of an open class are conjugated with suffixes deriving from an auxiliary bearing the Afroasiatic subject prefixes seen in the closed class. In (5) is a small sample of this evidence: two Tamazight Berber verbs each in the perfect and in the geminated imperfect so-called 'intensive' (Pencheon 1973: 34), and three forms each of two Saho verbs, one of the suffixing and one of the prefixing verb classes (Welmers 1952: 236).

(5) a. Tamazight basic and intensive verbs (3m.sg. forms)

Perfect	Present ('Intensive')
<i>i-krəz</i>	<i>i-kərrəz</i> 'plough'
<i>i-zrəy</i>	<i>i-zərrəy</i> 'pass'

b. Saho suffixing and prefixing verbs

Sg.1	<i>ħab-e</i> 'I left'	<i>u-bl-e</i> 'I saw'
Sg.2	<i>ħab-te</i>	<i>tu-bl-e</i>
Pl.3	<i>ħab-en</i>	<i>yu-bl-in</i>

Among the evidence that the Afroasiatic formal verb dichotomy had a semantic basis is that of the 100 or so Saho prefixing-type verbs about two-thirds are transitive, but of the open-class suffixing verbs only about half are transitive. The Tamazight 'intensive' is basically just a present or imperfect, and would no doubt be so called if it were not for the Arabic-influenced grammatical tradition for these languages, which, as for ES, interprets second-consonant gemination as formation of an intensive.

2.5. Reconstruction

The few Semitic comparisons of (1), (2), (3) and (4), and our very brief consideration of other Afroasiatic languages of (5), are not intended to establish a reconstruction of Proto-Semitic or certainly Afroasiatic verbal morphology, but

only to show the range of data and opinion for the likelihood of (6), argued, generally, by the mentioned authors and others.

(6) Proto-Semitic and/or Afroasiatic basic verb morphology

- a. *CVCVC(-V), a stative
- b. *(y)V-CCVC, a past or perfect active
- c. *(y)V-CVC:VC, a present or imperfect active

3. The ES A/B-type Dichotomy

The purpose of this paper is to take note that concerning (6), probably the most researched issue in Afroasiatic linguistics, the most prominent characteristic of ES languages, the A/B-type dichotomy, has been almost completely ignored, except uncritically as support for a geminating intensive for which the B-type is the assumed reflex. Reasonably important questions about the history of the two types have never been asked: (i) How could they have evolved from a distinction of basic and derived forms? (ii) Why is the semantic evidence of such a history so lacking? (iii) If the B-type is an old intensive, what is the role of the common ES reduplicated intensive?

It seems apparent that the questions were not considered important since the forms only, not form and meaning correspondences, were compared to those of other Semitic languages. The initial associations were made before the Akkadian evidence came along, and form-wise the B-type goes alongside the Arabic form II. Even when evidence has been raised for consonant length in the reconstructed present stem (by Rössler, Greenberg, and Voigt), and about the contribution of stative/active meanings in the proto-system (Goetze, Rössler, Buccellati), the ES evidence has not been reevaluated. Difficulty or obscurity of the data cannot explain this result, which, however, can be readily attributed to a combination of factors:

a. The classical 'analogue' tendency in historical linguistics to ignore irregularity or lexical characteristics in both data and reconstruction, which resulted in suppression of recognition in the ES grammars of the plainly lexical status of the B-type;

b. Unreasonable priority in reconstruction given to Arabic, which focused attention on Arabic and Arabic-like phenomena at the simple level of form, a tendency generally recognized and corrected, it now seems, within Semitic linguistics;

c. Perhaps an element of racial prejudice in the original discounting of the Ethiopian data, as also seen, for example, in the employment and persistence of the notion 'Hamitic language', according to Greenberg (1955: 55 [1963: 51]).

But objective evaluation of the ES A/B-dichotomy must support reconstruction of the Akkadian-type over the Arabic-type verbal system, including the existence of a formally expressed distinction of stative and active verbs.

1. My main point: since the A/B-type dichotomy must be reconstructed for Proto-ES, there is unquestionably an ES cognate to the Akkadian present in the Proto-ES B-type, which is also characterized by gemination of the second consonant.

2. The source of the A/B-type dichotomy is not reasonably in a distinction of basic and derived intensive (or causative) stem, since the breakdown of such a distinction would favor persistent analogical extension of the basic stem, and

survival of this stem only, with perhaps only lexicalized and, at least generally, semantically transparent relics of the earlier intensive or other derived meanings, and not the actual ES state of competing lexical types. Furthermore, as we have seen, the category of reduplicated derived intensive is alive and well in ES.

3. A semantic and lexical dichotomy reflected in a difference of forms, such as in Akkadian, of stative vs. active (or intransitive vs. transitive, durative vs. punctual), however, would reasonably break down in a competition between the forms which, with crossing analogies of form, could yield the variety of A/B-type outcomes in ES as seen in (1). Starting earlier or in slightly different circumstances, the active/transitives could have been reinterpreted as an intensive or causative formation in some languages (Arabic, Hebrew), have survived as prefixing relics only in some (Saho, Beja, Somali, Agaw), and have been fully replaced by leveling in other languages (Oromo, Sidamo, etc.).

4. Most importantly, there is very good ES evidence that the A/B-types reflect an earlier contrast of meaning, along the lines of stative vs. active or intransitive vs. transitive. I have discussed some of this evidence elsewhere (Hudson 1979, 1991).

a. Numerically, B-types tend significantly to be transitives (Cowley 1969: 5; Bender and Fulass 1978: 78).

b. Throughout ES there survives, alive and well, a formally-reflected distinction of transitive and intransitive: in most of the languages there are two causative-forming prefixes, one for use with intransitive roots and one for use with transitives. Furthermore the two causatives give evidence for the basically transitive origin of the B-types, since typically causatives of transitives, whether A or B type, are conjugated with the B-type characteristic of long second consonant or, in the languages that have lost gemination, such as Harari, the B-type's front vowel. Some of these data are presented in (7), from Amharic, which has causative prefixes *a-* and *as-*, the latter for transitives, and Harari, which has causative prefixes *a-* and *at-*, the latter for transitives (Leslau 1958: 32).

(7) ES Causatives (A-type 3m.sg. present forms)

	Root		Causative
Amharic	<i>dkm</i>	'tire' (vi.)	<i>y-a-də ki m</i>
"	<i>sbr</i>	'break' (vt.)	<i>y-as-sə bbī r</i>
Harari	<i>bsl</i>	'ripen' (vi.)	<i>y-a-bə sli</i>
"	<i>sbr</i>	'break' (vt.)	<i>y-at-seebri</i>

c. Passive/reflexive derivatives, throughout ES marked by the prefix *t-* (perhaps basically reflexive in Semitic), are necessarily based on transitive rather than intransitive verbs. Interestingly, in ES and often elsewhere in Semitic, passive/reflexives are derived with a long second consonant or other B-type characteristic (in Harari, stem-shape CVCVC, discussed below), even when formed on A-type roots like *sbr* 'break', as in (8).

(8) ES passives (3m.sg. present)

Ge'ez	<i>yí-t-səbbər</i>
Amharic	<i>yí-s-səbbər</i> (< <i>yí-t-səbbər</i>)
Harari	<i>yí-t-səbər</i>

Arabic form 5, generally a reflexive, has gemination in both perfect *taqattal-u* and imperfect *ya-taqattal-u*.

d. Present conjugation stems of ES reflexive/passive verbs, in addition to B-type gemination, have not only the stem shape but the vocalization of the past conjugation, not of the present. See in (8) the Ge'ez and Amharic passive present stem *səbbər* vs. Ge'ez basic present *səbbər*, Amh. *səbr*, and Harari *səbər* vs. *səbri* of the basic present. This unexpected pattern, also seen in the Arabic form 5 (see above), can be understood in light of the present hypothesis, in which the present passive would be a form/meaning hybrid: in meaning active by virtue of basic or root transitivity and stative by virtue of passive derivation. The form of the present passive may be understood as an extension of the prefixes of the present active conjugation to a stative stem CVC(:)əC, perhaps with gemination extended from the basic present stem CVC:ɨC. Such an understanding may seem rather complex, but such an outcome would seem reasonable in the breakdown of the formal distinction of stative and active, which resulted also, I have argued above, in the ES A/B-type dichotomy itself.

e. Perhaps the front vowel characteristic of the B-type may receive explanation on the hypothesis that the B-type was the active, originally prefixing, verb (and the A-type a later extension of the stative stem into the present (earlier active) conjugation by the addition of the prefixes). The first stem-vowel of the Proto-ES (present/active) B-type **yi*-Ca C:VC (Akkadian *i*-Ca C:{*i,u,a*}C), would have found itself in a closed syllable preceded and often followed by high vowels, and so could naturally have yielded **yi*-Ce C:VC by umlauting.

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