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Article

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Part I: New Readings from the First Sheet

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In October 2009, in the framework of the fourth meeting of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Semitistik in der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Franz-Christoph Muth presented to the scholarly world what can be legitimately considered one of the most impressive discoveries in the modern history of Ethiopian philology and linguistics: 475 Arabic lexemes translated into several South Ethiopian idioms and put down in Arabic letters are preserved in a late-14th century manuscript which forms part of a codex found by Daniel M. Varisco in a private Yemeni collection and published by Varisco and G. Rex Smith in 1998.

After a short while, Muth was able to publish the results of his analysis of the Glossary in a special article (Muth 2009–2010), where the interested reader will find a highly informative summary of the general background of al-Malik al-Afdal’s codex, followed by a detailed description of the Glossary, including a comprehensive description of its thematic segments. A complete transliteration of the Glossary accompanied by the German translation of the Arabic and Ethiopic entries can be found in one of the appendices.

The revolutionary impact of the Glossary on various aspects of the historical grammar and lexicography of Ethiopian Semitic was immediately recognized by Leonid Kogan, who also attended the Leipzig meeting. From autumn 2009 on, the present authors have been working on a comprehensive, monograph-format edition of the Glossary, followed by a detailed analysis of the phonological and morphological shape of the Ethiopian lexemes and their possible dialectal distribution.

1 Mostly classical but, at times, apparently also dialectal, which provides an Arabist with a unique glimpse of the late-medieval cultural vocabulary of Yemenite Arabic.
2 That we are faced with a “list of Arabic words and their Ethiopian equivalents” was clear already to the original editors (VARISCO – SMITH 1998: 15), yet, to the best of our knowledge, before 2009 this remarkable fact did not receive any explicit reaction from either Ethiopian or Semitic scholarship. In such a context, the impact and originality of Muth’s presentation cannot be overestimated.
3 Since 2012, the project is supported by RFH (No. 12-04-00092a), to which we extend our sincere gratitude.
It was in February 2012 that we became acquainted with Muth’s article. By that time, our own preliminary analysis of the Glossary was completed, providing an excellent opportunity for a critical comparison between two completely independent attempts at deciphering this fascinating document.

There is no doubt that many, perhaps most of Muth’s identifications are quite persuasive and betray a keen and penetrating understanding of both Arabic and Ethiopic facts. Yet it is equally certain that his publication cannot be considered the last word in the philological and linguistic analysis of the Glossary. While some of the Arabic and Ethiopic entries qualified as “illegible” by Muth, upon a closer inspection, are quite well understandable, in a few other cases alternative readings can be proposed which, as far as we can see, are superior to Muth’s in terms of palaeography, phonology and/or semantics.

The present note, the first one in a series of forthcoming preliminary publications by our team, contains 34 entries from the first sheet of the Glossary where identification in Muth’s article is either missing altogether or not sufficiently convincing. The compact format of this note prompts us to present our findings in a very condensed manner, leaving most of the details for the eventual comprehensive edition. This pertains, first of all, to palaeographic details, but also to the etymological evidence.4

217 upper margin, gloss A

One of the two notes written on the upper margin (disregarded by Muth) reads | ‘al-mar’at- ‘woman’ (Lane 1863–1893: 2703) | nst. The ES form reflects the widely attested designation of “woman, female”: Gə’zz ‘anst (Leslau 1987: 32), Tna. anasti (Kane 2000: 1476f.), Amh. anost (Kane 1990: 1213), Har. anosti (Leslau 1963: 29), Wol. anost, Sāl. Zay anost (Leslau 1979: 74), Gaf. ansatā (Leslau 1956: 180), Gog. Sod. anost, Geto anst, Muḥ. Msq. anst (Leslau 1979: 74). This gloss supplies a basic designation of “woman” which seems to be missing from the main body of the text: the ES gloss in A 3, supposed to mean “woman” by Muth (2009–2010: 98), remains obscure, but it is extremely unlikely that the Arabic equivalent (partly illegible under a blot) can correspond to such a meaning (a more probable reading seems to be | fulān- ‘so-and-so’).

4 As in Muth’s study, each sheet will be divided into six double columns (Arabic and Ethiopic), designated (from left to right) as A, B, C, D, E, F. The number following the capital letter (A 3) refers to the position of the Arabic entry, whereas 217 refers to p. 217 of the original edition, which corresponds to the first sheet of the Glossary. Alternative ES translations for one Arabic entry will be designated as Gloss A, B, C and D.
The second gloss on the upper margin, also left out of consideration in Muth’s study, provides a second Ethiopic translation for the meaning “woman”: ϰϦϗϘϝ˸ϳϮγ΢ wa-yuq à lu swy dž. The sequence swy dž likely stands for *säwäyì, comparable to Tna. säbäyti (Kane 2000: 699), Amh. säbäyti (Kane 1990: 530), Zay set (Leslau 1979: 565). While none of the attested lexemes can fully account for the phonetic shape of the ES gloss, it can plausibly be considered an early SES parallel to Tna. säbäyti, with spirantization of intervocalic *b and palatalization of *t in the vicinity of y. Admittedly, such a form cannot be considered the direct forerunner of the attested Amharic and Zay lexemes, which preserve the non-palatalized t.

The ES gloss is identical with Amh. wänd (Kane 1990: 1545), Arg. wänd (Leslau 1997: 225).

As long as τ is thought to represent *t (rather than þ), none of the attested ES forms can be identified as the exact parallel to the ES gloss.6

Note the post-classical oblique form of the dual.

Palatalization *t > þ in the attested ES lexemes can possibly be accounted for by the influence of the fossilized dual marker *-e, a well-known phenomenon elsewhere in SES (PODOLSKY 1991: 41).

217 A 19

Gloss A: mammar.
Gloss B: dmdas.

Both ES glosses can be easily identified with ES designations of ‘nape of the neck’.


dämđäss: Amh. dändäss ‘thick neck, back of the neck and the shoulders’ (Kane 1990: 180).

In view of the complete semantic overlap between the two ES glosses, a similar meaning is undoubtedly to be ascribed to the Arabic entry, against Muth (2009–2010: 89) who reads kaffain ‘Handflächen’. No semantically fitting lexeme corresponding to the graphic shape of the Arabic entry has been found, but note perhaps muṣammar- ‘the back of the neck’ (Lane 1863–1893: 978), which could imply a reading like *al-ṣaymar-?

217 left margin gloss D

wa-yuqālu fiḥi brs ‘and it is said for it brs’.

This is the second gloss for Arabic baṭn- in 217 A 27. The ES reconstruction is *ḥārs, based on well-known cognates: Goʿez karš (Leslau 1987: 294), Tgr. kars (Littmann – Höfner 1962: 399), Tna. kārsi (Kane 2000: 1592), Arg. kārs, hārs (Leslau 1997: 209), Har. kārsi (Leslau 1963: 94), Gaf. arsā (Leslau 1956: 182), Sod. kārs (Leslau 1979: 351). It is noteworthy that most of the attested ES forms do not show spirantization of *k, which is patent in the gloss (on this phenomenon see Podolsky 1991: 32ff.).

217 B 5


217 B 7


The reconstruction *mṛṭ derives from Amh. mṛt ‘anus; bottom, butt’ (Kane 1990: 199), Arg. mṛt ‘anus, bottom’ (Leslau 1997: 213), Sod. mṛṭ
‘genital organs’ (Leslau 1979: 425). Muth’s identification with-kit (with an alleged by-form kirt) is unconvincing.

217 B 17


217 C 13


217 C 18

The ES gloss *därnä corresponds to G*ʒを迎え därnà (Leslau 1987: 143), Amh. därnà ‘quail’ (Alauda cristata or Perdrix coturnix)’ (Kane 1990: 1750). The semantic difference is noteworthy, but certainly not a serious obstacle.

217 C 23

The ES gloss *äwä is likely identical to the Ethiopian designations of the francolin partridge: G*ʒを見つけ owa (Leslau 1987: 438), Tgr. owa (Kane 2000: 972), Amh. owa (Kane 1990: 761), Arg. owa (Leslau 1997: 217), Sàl. oke, Wol. kàkù (Leslau 1979: 492), Gaf. kuqʷağgi (Leslau 1956: 224), Čaha Eţa oka, Muţ. Msq. oka, Sod. oka, Muţ. oka, Gog. oka, ënm. Geto okaʷa, ënd. okaⁿa (Leslau 1979: 492). Our reconstruction relies on the Gafat form, but if the dot in the last letter is disregarded, an alternative reconstruction *kàkwah, coming close to the G*žを見つけ, Tagre and Tagrānña forms, becomes possible.

217 D 4

The ES gloss *wantür corresponds to Arabic ‘al-‘afw- ‘al-ṣāgīr- ‘young ass’ (Lane 1863–1893: 2094)

217 D 5

The ES gloss can be reconstructed as *wänž on the basis of Geto wanžät, Čaha Eža Mu. Ṽaṽžät ‘hawk’ (Leslau 1979: 658), Ñnd. Ṽaṽgōd id. (ibid., p. 656).

217 D 13

The ES gloss, likely to be reconstructed as *ançac’al, can be compared to Amh. m삼šalli ‘chameleon’ (Kane 1990: 1214). The alternation between č and š is attested in ES (v. Leslau 1979: lxii) including Amharic, cf. such free variants as t₃aŋg₃ar₅a/t₃aŋg₃ar₆a ‘to be hard-pressed’ (Kane 1990: 660, 1014) or čaʃal/ʃaʃal ‘eyebrow’ (ibid., pp. 666, 1015).

217 D 23

The ES gloss is identical to the widely attested designation of bean: Tgr. adung’₃a (Littmann – Höfner 1962: 384), Tna. ‘adag’₃a (Kane 2000: 1535), Amh. ad₃₃₃r₃e (Kane 1990: 1308), Arg. adungere (Leslau 1997: 189), Zay adangura (Leslau 1979: 17), Gaf. ad₃₃₃r₃e (Leslau 1956: 172), Muḥ. ad₃₃₃r₃e (Leslau 1979: 17). The ’alif rendering the initial a- seems to be, peculiarly, written as a small vertical stroke above ġim.

217 E 10

The ES gloss can be reconstructed as *d₃₃₃n₃k on the basis of the ES designations of potato: Tna. ḏ₃₃₃n₃ (Kane 2000: 2122), Amh. ḏ₃₃₃nc (Kane 1990: 1801), Arg. ḏ₃₃₃nc (Leslau 1997: 199), Har. d₃₃₃nc (Leslau 1963: 57), Sol. Zay d₃₃₃nc, Wol. d₃₃₃nc (Leslau 1979: 212), Muḥ. Msq. Gog. Sod. d₃₃₃nc (ibid.), Eža d₃₃₃nc, Čaha d₃₃₃nc, Geto d₃₃₃nc, Ņnd. d₃₃₃nc, d₃₃₃nc, Ţmn. d₃₃₃nc (ibid.). All these forms display word-final č (Tna. š), which can well result from k via palatalization. The semantic difference is unproblematic.

The ES gloss is likely to be reconstructed as *nìon the basis of Amh. ŋnkoy ‘a large tree which produces a tasty, yellow fruit (Ximenia americana)’ (Kane 1990: 1412), Wol. košm, Sȶl. košm ‘kind of tree’ (Leslau 1979: 25), Msq. Gog. Sobla, Čaha Eža šäbra, Geto šähra, Ǝnm. šähra, Muḥ. šâbōya, Ǝnd. šâwrâ (ibid.).

The ES gloss *sawr* is identical with Amh. *sinar* ‘a kind of oat (Avena abyssinica) used as horse fodder which grows among barley’ (Kane 1990: 535); see Strelcyn (1973: 175f.) for its use in preparation of *tulla* (local beer).

In his treatment of this entry, Muth (2009–2010: 99) departs from the meaning ‘grüne Melonenart’, characteristic for *djr* in Classical Arabic (Lane 1863–1893: 1959), but is unable to provide any suitable interpretation for the ES gloss. However, the dialectal Yemeni meanings adduced above are well compatible with a reconstruction *bär* (a) ‘reed; stalk’, based on G*zbr* ‘reed, reed pen, branch of a chandelier, stalk, stem of fruit, stubble’ (Leslau 1987: 101), Tna. *bri* ‘pen (for writing); stubble of wheat or barley’ (Kane 1990: 875).


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tādā, Muḥ. dād, Eža Msq. Gog. dādd ‘juniper’ (Leslau 1979: 612). A more archaic shape of this common ES term is attested in Gēz sohd, sohād ‘juniper, cedar’ (Leslau 1987: 554). Muth’s identification with what he adduces as “dur (Holz)” (Muth 2009–2010: 99) can be safely excluded both palaeographically (the first letter of the ES gloss is a clear tā) and semantically (Amh. dur designates ‘wood, forest’, not ‘wood, timber’).

The ES gloss likely corresponds to Har. mēdān ‘plain’ (Leslau 1963: 103). The diachronic background of the Harari word remains to be elucidated. As recognized by Leslau, it looks like an obvious borrowing from Arb. maydān-, mēdān- (Lane 1863–1893: 2746), but the only meaning attested for this word in Classical Arabic seems to be ‘race ground, hippodrome’. Although Dozy 1881, II, 635 gives ‘plaine en général’ for some post-Classical sources, one may wonder whether the general meaning ‘plain’ in Harari might have rather arisen by contamination with Tgr. meda ‘plain, meadow, field’ (Kane 2000: 504), Amh. meda ‘plain, field’ (Kane 1990: 320), meda ‘plain’ (Leslau 1997: 211), Wol. medā ‘plain, field, meadow’ (Leslau 1979: 390), Sod. mida, meda, Čaha Eža Muḥ. mida ‘plain, field, meadow’ (ibid.). Note that the Arabic article, present in the ES gloss, is missing from the attested Harari form.

The ES gloss *al-marā ‘pasturage, place of pasture’ (Lane 1863–1893: 1110) | الميدان

The ES gloss corresponds to Har. mēdān ‘plain’ (Leslau 1963: 103). The diachronic background of the Harari word remains to be elucidated. As recognized by Leslau, it looks like an obvious borrowing from Arb. maydān-, mēdān- (Lane 1863–1893: 2746), but the only meaning attested for this word in Classical Arabic seems to be ‘race ground, hippodrome’. Although Dozy 1881, II, 635 gives ‘plaine en général’ for some post-Classical sources, one may wonder whether the general meaning ‘plain’ in Harari might have rather arisen by contamination with Tgr. meda ‘plain, meadow, field’ (Kane 2000: 504), Amh. meda ‘plain, field’ (Kane 1990: 320), meda ‘plain’ (Leslau 1997: 211), Wol. medā ‘plain, field, meadow’ (Leslau 1979: 390), Sod. mida, meda, Čaha Eža Muḥ. mida ‘plain, field, meadow’ (ibid.). Note that the Arabic article, present in the ES gloss, is missing from the attested Harari form.

The ES gloss *’al-amāh(-) ‘Lawsonia inermis’ (Lane 1863–1893: 654) | انسولسب.

The ES gloss *’ansuslah corresponds to Amh. ansusolla ‘henna (Impatiens tinctoria)’ (Kane 1990: 1213), Muḥ. Sod. ansusolla ‘red fruit similar to potatoes’ (Leslau 1979: 75); see further Strelcyn (1973: 62, 170).

The ES gloss may be compared to Amh. amād ‘large quantity’ (Kane 1990: 1137), Ġnd. Geto amād, Ġnd. hamād ‘abundant, much, many’, Muḥ. amad ‘time of abundance’ (Leslau 1979: 47). According to Leslau, these ES forms go back, with a metaphorical semantic development, to common ES *hamad ‘ashes, soil, dirt’, albeit the presence of b in Ġndāgān is unexpected in such a case (the instances of Ġndāgān b corresponding to ES  are rare and mostly belong to loanwords, see ibid., p. lxiv). We have to admit that the validity of our identification is to some extent weakened by the presence of * ’alif as the first letter of the ES gloss (*’abamād), which has no parallel in any of the comparable ES terms.

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217 F 12  
رَانِح    |  zānb.

The second gloss to Arabic subh- ‘morning, dawn’ is identical to Arg. zañña ‘dawn’ (Leslau 1997: 227), Har. ziñät ‘dawn’ (Leslau 1963: 167), Zay zañat ‘dawn, early morning, daylight’ (Leslau 1979: 712), Muľ. Msq. Gog. Sod. zañät ‘dawn, early morning, daylight’ (ibid.). While none of the comparable ES forms displays the final guttural as the ES gloss, a trace of it can be seen in the palatalized ːn, which could well have emerged as a consequence of the loss of the guttural (Podolsky 1991: 38f.).

217 F 14  
زَجَمْحَامَ (1105) |  rugumgäm.

The ES gloss *rugumgam comes close to Amh. tärgwägmäggwämä ‘to grumble, mutter complainingly, to rumble, e. g. thunder’ (Kane 1990: 413). Phonetically similar designations of thunder are attested elsewhere in Southern ES, note especially Arg. gurmumta (Leslau 1997: 203) and Zay gmgmtät (Leslau 1979: 277). The reconstruction *nägwädgwad proposed in Muth (2009–2010: 100; for the corresponding ES forms see Leslau 1987: 182) is practically excluded on palaeographic grounds.

217 F 17  
ٽَرَمْطَرَ |  tartar.

The ES gloss can probably be reconstructed as *tärtär on the basis of Čha Eža ùnm. Geto ꟯รณDIC, Čha Msq. ꟯ꜥ MQTT, Muľ. ꟯ꜥ MQTT, Čha Eža ꟯ꜥ MQTT, ùnm. ꟯ꜥ MQTT ‘small stream of water, source’ (Leslau 1979: 188).

217 F 19  
ٽَمْ |  gum.

This is the second gloss to Arabic sabáb- ‘cloud’ in 217 F 18. It is to be reconstructed as *gum, which corresponds to ES designations of ‘fog, cloud, mist’: Gǝˈzı́ gimǝ, gum (Leslau 1987: 193), Tgr. gim (Littmann – Höfner 1962: 566), Tna. gǝmǝ, gimǝ, gınǝ (Kane 2000: 2236), Amh. gum (Kane 1990: 1906), Arg. gǝmo (Leslau 1997: 201), ùnd. Geto giwǝ, ùnm. gowǝ (Leslau 1979: 302).

Abbreviations of language names

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Summary

The paper presents the preliminary results of a thorough palaeographic and etymological analysis of the first sheet of the al-Malik al-Afdal’s 14th century Arabic–Ethiopic Glossary, undertaken by the team of Russian scholars in the framework of a project on edition and publication of the whole Glossary. The results are compared with the identifications offered recently by Franz-Christoph Muth. For the 34 entries from the first sheet of the Glossary, whose identification in Muth’s publication is either missing altogether or not sufficiently convincing, new identifications are offered and discussed.