PERSONALIA

In memoriam Gideon Goldenberg (1930–2013)
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Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

AÉ  

AthFor  

AethFor  

AION  

BSOAS  

CSCO  
Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.

EFAH  
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung, Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, herausgegeben im Auftrag des Instituts von Norbert Nebes.

EMML  
Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.

IJAH  

JAH  

JES  

JSS  
Journal of Semitic Studies, Manchester 1956ff.

NEAS  

OrChr  

OrChrp  
Oriantia Christiana Periodica, Roma 1935ff.

PICES  

PICES  

PO  
Patrologia Orientalis, 193ff.

RIÈ  

RSE  

SÄe  
Scriptores Aethiopici.

ZDMG  

Aethiopica 17 (2014)
Personalia

In memoriam Gideon Goldenberg (1930–2013)

RICCARDO CONTINI, University of Naples “L’Orientale”

Semitic scholars and linguists all over the world were grieved to learn of the demise in Jerusalem on July 30th, 2013, in his 84th year, of Gideon Goldenberg, one of the last great masters of the field, whose broad range of research interests included Semitic comparative linguistics, the Ethio-Semitic languages, Syriac and North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic, Hebrew, and the history of linguistics (both the European and the native Semitic traditions).1

Born in Tel Aviv on February 1st, 1930, of Russian-born parents immigrated to Mandatory Palestine at the beginning of the century, Gideon Goldenberg joined the Palmach in 1947 and fought in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948. He then attended the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, obtaining his M.A. in Hebrew language in 1956 and his Ph.D. in 1966, writing his dissertation on the Amharic tense-system under the supervision of the prominent Egyptologist and Semitic philologist Hans-Jakob Polotsky (1905–1991). He taught from 1959 to 1985 at Tel Aviv University, where he first co-founded with M.J. Kister and headed the Department of Arabic, then founded and headed for two decades the Department of Linguistics. In 1985 he obtained a chair at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, dividing his teaching and administrative responsibilities between the Departments of Hebrew Language and Linguistics; Emeritus since 1998, he taught for twelve more years after retirement. He was a visiting professor at the University of Addis Ababa, at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), at the University of Leiden, and at the University of Naples Frederick II. He was a recipient of the Israel Prize for Language Sciences in 1993; he was a Member of the Academy of the Hebrew Language since 1973, a Member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities since 1996, a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy since 1999. He leaves his wife Esther, a linguist specializing in Medieval Hebrew, one son, Yossi, one daughter, Efrat, two grandsons and three granddaughters.

1 My heartfelt gratitude goes to Esther Goldenberg and Roni Henkin for factual and bibliographical information, and to Maria Maddalena Colasuonno for help with the Hebrew sources.
Like his greatly admired master Polotsky, Goldenberg truly deserves the epithet (shaped like one of the tautological structures that he brilliantly described in Semitic) of “linguists’ linguist”, not only for the amazing number of languages (Semitic and European, with the addition of Coptic and Turkish) that he mastered, but even more for his superb command of linguistic methodology, both in descriptive synchronic and in comparative and diachronic analysis. His outstanding and inspiring contributions to Semitic linguistics are contained in more than 60 essays, the most important of which are collected in the two capital volumes Studies in Semitic Linguistics (1998) and Further Studies in Semitic Linguistics (2013). Only a few months before Goldenberg’s demise a synthesis of his views on several issues of Semitic historical and descriptive linguistics has been published as Semitic languages: Features, structures, relations, processes (2013), his only monograph apart from his Ph.D. thesis in Hebrew on the Amharic verb.

Though his favourite genre of scholarly expression was certainly represented by highly original, closely argued, carefully documented and lucidly worded articles (in English or Hebrew), which in several cases a scholar with less exacting standards and conciseness of expression could easily have “promoted” to book format simply by enlarging the superlative selection of illustrative examples (always culled from a wide range of connected texts or from actual discourse), as well as by engaging in lengthy discussions of previous treatments of the subject, Goldenberg – albeit much less than his teacher and mentor Polotsky – has also composed several learned and incisive book reviews and review-articles: while the most important of them have duly been reproduced in the two volumes of collected essays, many others have not, which would certainly deserve to be reprinted. Even some devoted to non-linguistic topics – as is often the case with this master of the whole breadth of Semitic philology – contain original remarks relevant for Semitic linguistics: e.g. his discussion of the Jewish vs. Christian affiliation of some Aramaic loanwords in Gən in his review of Edward Ullendorff’s Ethiopia and the Bible (1969), or his pointing out the previously unrecorded Syriac possessive pattern N1 + proleptic suffix + l- + N2 in his review of

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2 One thinks particularly of essays such as “Kastanđa, Studies in a northern Gurage language of Christians” (1968), “Tautological infinitive” (1971), “The Semitic languages of Ethiopia and their classification” (1977), “On Syriac sentence-structure” (1983), and “Principles of Semitic word-structure” (1994): any competent reader can easily realize the huge amount of work, time and thought invested by their author in these exceptional contributions to Semitic linguistics, each of which would be sufficient to the fame of a lesser scholar.
Ullendorff’s *The Ethiopians* (1979), a discovery whose implications were later discussed by Simon Hopkins.  

Ethiopian languages were always one of Goldenberg’s favourite research areas, to which he devoted several years of fieldwork, mainly on Amharic and Gurage, his aforementioned Ph.D. thesis on the Amharic tense-system – which he considered with Tagrama’s the most expanded one in Neo-Semitic – and a large number of articles on specific issues of morpho-syntax and sentence structure, as well as masterly review-articles on the classification of Ethio-Semitic (1977) and on the vocabulary and etymology of Ga’aaz (1992) and Gurage (1987), all of them based on decades of personal collection and meticulous analysis of original materials. We may hope that the full-fledged grammar of Kastanaana which he had been working for a long time may eventually be published from his Nachlass.  

Another Semitic subgroup to which Goldenberg devoted much attention was Aramaic, most particularly Syriac, whose very distinctive and complex predicative structures and pragmatic phenomena he illustrated in a series of masterly essays (e.g. “On Syriac sentence-structure”, 1983; “On some niceties of Syriac syntax”, 1990; “Bible translations and Syriac idiom”, 1995). He also gave signal contributions to the analysis of evolutionary trends in the tense-system of Aramaic (“Aramaic perfects”, 1992) and of the different paths of verbalization preparing the way to the contemporary dialects (“Early Neo-Aramaic and present-day dialectal diversity”, 2000). Concerning Neo-Aramaic itself, Goldenberg mostly dealt with the literary N.E.N.A. varieties of Jewish Zakho and Christian Urmî, but also highlighted the comparative importance of the extinct dialects of Hertevin (1993) and Mlahsô (belonging to the Turoyo group, 1998) discovered and described by Otto Jastrow.  

In the field of Classical Arabic, what mostly attracted Goldenberg’s attention was the highlighting of the correct solutions of crucial problems of Semitic morphology and syntax advanced by the native Arab grammarians, and often neglected by Western linguists, e.g. of indirect adjectives and of other forms of attribution (“Allādi al-maṣdarīyyah in Arab grammatical tradition”, 1994; “Two types of phrase adjectivization”, 2002), of the predicative relation (“Subject and predicate in Arab grammatical tradition”,

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4 This is expressly mentioned in Goldenberg’s précis of his work on Ethio-Semitic (2003), now in *Further studies in Semitic linguistics*, pp. 148f.  
1988), or of the segmental analysis of long vowels, subsequently borrowed by the medieval Jewish grammarians (“The treatment of vowel length in Arabic grammar and its adaptation to Hebrew”, 2012).

Hebrew, both Ancient and Modern, always played a pivotal role in Goldenberg’s linguistic reflection, even though relatively few of his writings are devoted to it ex professo: among these deserve special mention his treatment of the grammatical implications of direct speech in Biblical Hebrew (1991) and his exposition of the profile of Hebrew as a living Semitic language, pronounced on the occasion of the centenary of the language’s revival (1996).

The more systematic presentation of the data in Semitic languages (2013), besides repositioning in a comparative perspective the phenomena of the languages detailed above, shows that Goldenberg was very knowledgeable and up to date also on the other languages, be they contemporary (such as Modern South Arabian Mehri, the Neo-Arabic dialects – of which he often quotes personally collected samples of Palestinian Arabic – and Maltese) or ancient: despite his explicit reluctance to base far-reaching reconstructions of the subgrouping of Semitic or of the earliest history of some structural features on poorly documented languages, not to say Restsprachen, he however made use of relevant data of Ugaritic, Phoenician-Punic and Ancient South Arabian whenever their testimony was necessary for a satisfactory interpretation of the problem at hand.

The broader realm of Semitic linguistics, both diachronic and synchronic, was possibly, however, Goldenberg’s central research interest, to which all the fields listed so far were somehow subordinated. This marks rather a difference with respect to his teacher Polotsky, who was more interested in the description of specific Semitic languages than in the family as such: Goldenberg, on the contrary, devoted about twenty essays to topics of general Semitic interest, from his first masterly treatment of the tautological infinitive (1971) to his last public lecture on impersonals, delivered on June 26th, 2013, at a Neo-Aramaic conference in Jerusalem. The thematic range of his contributions is very broad, still broader if one takes into account the updated discussion of the same topics in Semitic languages (2013): “Conservative and innovative features in Semitic languages” (1997), the tripartition operating in root-and-pattern morphology and word structure (“Principles of Semitic word-structure”, 1994; “Word-structure, morphological analysis, the Semitic languages and beyond”, 2005; “Semitic triradicalism and the biradical question”, 2005), the processes of verbalization and the development of tense-systems (“Exponents of independent indicative”, 2005), grammatical agreement and semantic cases (“Congruence and comitative and a problem of linguistic typology”, 1978), the typology of attribution (“Attribution in Semitic languages”, 1995) and predication (“Pronouns,
copulas and a syntactical revolution in Neo-Semitic”, 2005) as cardinal grammatical bonds in Semitic, the diverse strategies of thematization and rhetmatization (“Tautological infinitive”, 1971; “Imperfectly-transformed cleft sentences”, 1977), the correct interpretation of verb-initial sentences (“On grammatical agreement and verb-initial sentences”, 2006), alignment variations in the sentence (“Actants and diathesis, directions of transitivity & c.: some Satzgestaltungen and their background in Semitic and elsewhere”, 2007), “The contribution of Semitic languages to linguistic thinking” (1988, 2002), and many more. Besides, most of Goldenberg’s discussions of these and other topics in individual Semitic languages take into account their implications for comparative Semitic and general linguistics. While the best of his energies was undoubtedly devoted to the realm of grammar in its entire phenomenology, Goldenberg always retained a keen interest for facts of Semitic lexicology as well as for the semantic processes involved in the history of words: this aspect is more visible in several of his notable book reviews than in his more developed scholarly oeuvre, but is of course recurrent in the oral tradition of his pupils.

No less impressive than his command of the most complex features of Semitic grammar and language history was Goldenberg’s expert interest in general linguistics: he was always ready to point out the typological or theoretical relevance of the topics which he discussed in one or more Semitic languages,6 assisted in this by his unrivalled competence in the history of the language sciences, including first-hand control of the native Semitic grammatical traditions. Each one of his writings is enriched by concise critical information on the history of previous treatments of the subject, be it the principles of genetic reconstruction, the organization of tense-systems, or the mechanism of cleft sentences. As his master Polotsky, Goldenberg avoided the adoption of any particular theoretical framework, and rather favoured a basically empirical and typological approach. He therefore always championed a reciprocally fruitful discussion between specialists in Semitic languages and general linguists: Semitic languages (2013), the book which may be considered his scientific legacy for a larger audience, is actually intended more for general linguists than for fellow Semitic scholars, as his insistence on the special achievements of Semitic linguistic traditions and on the rich illustration of the functioning in Semitic languages of the three main types of syntactic relations, already recognized by traditional Arab

6 What he wrote in 2003 concerning Ethio-Semitic applies also to all other Semitic languages: “I have always been especially interested in aspects of Neo-Ethiopian languages which throw light on general linguistic conceptions” (now in: Further studies in Semitic linguistics, p. 149).
grammar, – predicative, attributive, and adverbial/completive – most clearly show. Among the great masters of grammatical thought he found particularly fertile for the study of Semitic languages the insights of authorities often quoted by Polotsky (such as Ch. Bally, J. Damourette and É. Pichon, O. Jespersen, H. Paul),7 but also of J. Baudouin de Courtenay, E. Benveniste, Y. Malkiel, A. Meillet, L. Spitzer. Among contemporary language typologists he engaged discussions on several structural features of cross-linguistic relevance with, among others, A. Aikhenvald, R.M.W. Dixon, O. Dahl and M. Haspelmath. Goldenberg was particularly critical of the use of misnomers or infelicitous descriptions of linguistic phenomena (such as “synthetic” vs. “analytic” genitive, or the notion of ergativity applied to Semitic morpho-syntax), to which he imputed serious misunderstandings of the structures and processes involved. To his pupils he stressed the importance of consulting reliable dictionaries of linguistic terminology in different languages, as well as of a correct understanding of the termini technici employed by Arab, Syriac or Jewish grammarians: also in this respect, Semitic languages is a mine of invaluable information and sound interpretation.

In all his scholarly output Goldenberg was a master of compact exposition, clarity and precision of style, rigorous revision, bibliographical perfection, and typographical exactitude: these same qualities are also to be found in his editorial activity, displayed on the editorial boards of periodicals (such as Israel Oriental Studies) and encyclopaedias (lastly, of the Encyclopaedia Aethiopica), as well as in the single or joint responsibility for the proceedings of international conferences (the Sixth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, 1986; with Shlomo Raz, the seminar on Semitic linguistics at the Institute of Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994) and memorial studies (with Ariel Shisha-Halevy, the studies in memory of Polotsky, 2009).

A born teacher, Goldenberg was extremely effective in the classroom, and always ready to elaborate on his presentation of topics particularly interesting to his audience, but arguably – as one can gather from his pupils – gave his best in the supervision of research students, in which he displayed exceptional care and skill, building with those brilliant young people cordial and even affectionate relations, witness his warm recollection when dedicat-

7 As Haiim Rosén has pointed out, Polotsky and his pupils also anticipated or reinforced, respectively, some key concepts of the Prague school of structural linguistics: H.B. ROSÉN, “The Jerusalem school of linguistics and the Prague school”, in: P. SWIGGERS (ed.), Haiim B. Rosén. Bio-bibliographical sketch, followed by the late Prof. Rosén’s text “The Jerusalem school of linguistics and the Prague school” = Biobibliographies et exposés n.s. 8, Leuven: Centre International de Dialectologie Générale, 2005, pp. 33–61.
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ing to them his second volume of essays, and the numerous tributes paid him by his disciples. The author of these lines, who had the privilege of attending his classes in Semitic linguistics at UCLA in 1977, and in the following decades could enjoy his luminous teaching and his generous friendship, was often admitted, both in Jerusalem and on the occasion of Semitic conferences in several countries, as a guest in the large family of his disciples, and enjoyed numberless conversations with him along the years on a variety of language topics (among which stand out – outside the Semitic realm – the wider implications of some syntactic features of Italian, which he knew remarkably well) and on great linguists of the past; the present writer recalls with gratitude Gideon’s and Esther’s warm hospitality in their book-cluttered house in Rehavia, and thinks with awe of the treasures of linguistic lore with which he regaled his guests. Though he sometimes claimed not to speak any language really well apart from Hebrew, his proficiency in most European ones was admirable, as was his competence in several Jewish languages, particularly Yiddish.

As all his friends and pupils well know, Gideon had raised the writing of postcards to a minor art: inimitably pithy and full of humor, they communicated, besides his friendly greetings, his impressions of the scholarly venues which he had attended, of recent and less recent publications in the field which had engaged his attention, of (mostly, alleged) new discoveries or developments in Semitic studies. His graceful tracing of words in the main West Semitic scripts adorned many of these invaluable souvenirs, now enjoying an afterlife as bookmarks in the writings of a great linguist, a notable Mensch, and a deeply valued friend, whose memory is indeed a blessing.

8 Further studies in Semitic linguistics, pp. 5f.: “The personal and intellectual relations with them throughout the years have always been of great importance to me and a source of abiding happiness”. The impressive list of his doctoral pupils includes, in chronological order, Rafael Talmon, Baruch Podolsky, Roni Henkin, Tamar Zewi, Lea Tzivoni, Shlomit Shraybom-Shivtiel, Dana Taube, Chaim Kahana, Yaffa Israeli, Tali Bar, Eran Cohen, Rami Saari, Marta Rauret Domènech, Meley Mulugetta, Menashe Reichman, Eva Farstey, Ya’ar Hever, and Michal Marmorstein: many of them went on to distinguished academic careers.

Publications of Gideon Goldenberg

1964

1965

1966

1968

1969

1971

1974
- “Pi’el le-ribbon [Pi’el of plurality]”, Lešonēnu 38, p. 156.

The present list translates (with some minor changes) and supplements the one in Hebrew contributed by the late Rafi Talmon, the first of Goldenberg’s research students and a much appreciated friend and colleague, to the first volume in his honour: “List of Gideon Goldenberg’s publications”, in: Gideon Goldenberg Festschrift, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997, pp. [xix]–[xxvi].
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1976


1977


1978


1979


1980


1981


1982


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1990

1991

1992

1993

1994

1995


1996


1997


1998


1999

- “In memoriam Robert Hetzron”, *Aethiopica* 2, pp. 198–200.
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2000
- "Early Neo-Aramaic and present-day dialectal diversity", JSS 45, pp. 69–89 [= FurStudSemLing, pp. 235–252].

2002

2003
- Board ed.: EÆI.

2004

2005
- “Gurage languages”, in: E Ae II, pp. 924a–928a [= FurStudSemLing, pp. 185–191].
- Board ed.: E Ae II.

2006

2007
- Board ed.: E Ae III.

2009

2010
- “Raz, Shlomo”, in: E Ae IV, p. 343a–b.
- Board ed.: E Ae IV.
Remarking Donald Crummey and his role in Academia is not an easy task, given the huge amount of work he conducted in many fields of research and his innovative contribution to the scholarly debate. A remarkable curriculum, an intense and productive life distinguishes an outstanding scholar whose legacy is extremely difficult to sum up and compete with. Donald has influenced research into modern Ethiopian history for many decades, not only with his own work, but also by leading a team of collaborators among the young generation of scholars that are now lecturers at Addis Ababa University History Department, in the United States and Kenya.

Discussing his contribution to Ethiopian studies is extremely challenging, since this means dealing with a long period of prolonged fieldwork research involving key issues in the historiography of the modern country. A number of colleagues and friends, particularly in Ethiopia, have already discussed his personality and the leading role he played, and more will cer-