

Rebecca Hasselbach, Case in Semitic – Roles, Relations and Reconstruction. Oxford 2013. Oxford University Press. XIII + 353 pp. = Oxford Studies in Diachronic & Historical Linguistics 3. ISBN 978-0-19-967810-9.

This is the first full-size monograph devoted to the study of case in Semitic. After a summary of ‘Methodological Considerations’ (pp. 1-15) the authoress discusses the basic evidence and traditional reconstruction of the Semitic case system (pp. 16-89), problems of case as a typological problem (pp. 90-124), grammatical roles and the alignment of Semitic (pp. 125-181), head and dependent-marking in Semitic (pp. 182-257), the function of case markers in Semitic (pp. 258-326) and then final ‘Conclusions’ (pp. 327-332) close the book.

As far as the synchronic description of the grammatical category of case in the Semitic languages is concerned, there is nothing basically new and nothing really wrong. It has been explained that Proto-Semitic could not be ergative already before, e.g. by Satzinger (e.g. ‘Absolute state and absolutive case in Afro-Asiatic’, in: XII Incontro Italiano di Linguistica Camito-Semitica (Afroasiatica) – Atti, ed. M. Moriggi, 63-69, Rubettino 2007; A. Zaborski ‘On the alleged ergativity in Hamitosemitic/Afroasiatic languages’, in: Collectanea linguistica in honorem Casimiri Polański, eds M. Brzezina, H. Kurek, 309-317, Kraków 1999). The problem is with the reconstruction of this category in Proto-Semitic to which actually the book is mainly devoted. It cannot be accepted that (p. 328) ‘The GEN in *-i* is most likely a later innovation deriving from the *nisbe* (why ‘*nisbe*’ with dialect *imāla* and not Classical Arabic *nisba*? – AZ) ending.... The secondary nature of the GEN can be confirmed by the fact that it is the only case marker for which we can propose a reasonable etymology” not only because this reasoning is rather circular. The etymological connection of *-i* with *nisba* *ī/-iyy-* is quite conjectural and if possible at all, then a derivation of *nisba* from genitive *-i* is a more reasonable although not a simple hypothesis, actually only a hypothesis. First of all genitive *-i* must be of Afroasiatic origin since it occurs also in Egyptian, Cushitic, and even in Berber (cf. K.-G. Prasse, Manuel de grammaire touaregue t. II – Nom, Copenhagen 1974, pp. 107-108 and 112-113 and L. Galand, Regards sur le berbère, Milano 2010, p. 145 and 150). The big problem is that in Classical Arabic *nisba* suffix *-iyy-* is followed (!) by each of the case endings including genitive! There is also a different problem with compound suffix *-ān-iyy-* which occurs mainly in Arabic dialects but also in Classical Arabic, as well as *-aw-iyy-/āw-iyy-*. The authoress reconstructs three prehistoric stages of the Semitic languages, i.e. 1. “Archaic Proto-Semitic” when Semitic allegedly had no inflectional case marking and nouns generally ended in *-a*, 2. Second Archaic Proto-Semitic stage during which Semitic allegedly developed a case to mark nominal subjects, the nominative in *-u* while the ending *-a* which was

reanalyzed as accusative, was still the basic and citation form of the noun, 3. The last Proto-Semitic (but actually not ‘Proto’ since even the authoress says that this system is found in classical Semitic languages! – AZ) in which allegedly “the marked-nominative system shifted to nom/acc., with nominative being reanalyzed as the basic form of the noun. At this stage the genitive *-i* developed out of the Nisbe ending, resulting in the triptotic declension in the sing.” (pp. 331-332). The reconstruction of the allegedly caseless Archaic Proto-Semitic does not make sense even in the light of the data of the most archaic or conservative Semitic languages. It must be decisively refuted in the light of the data of other Afroasiatic (Hamitosemitic) languages which show beyond any doubt that case must be reconstructed not only for Proto-Semitic but already for Proto-Afroasiatic. The majority of Semitists still have either a very limited knowledge of other branches of the Afroasiatic macrofamily or no knowledge at all. The authoress of the book under review has read only some of the relevant studies on Cushitic, Berber and on the still enigmatic Omotic (perhaps even not Afroasiatic at all or in the best case West Cushitic being among the most innovating branches of Afroasiatic with very little or no value for ‘deep’ reconstruction of Proto-Afroasiatic) ignoring several basic studies, e.g. by Satzinger (see above as well as ‘Some remarks on the Afroasiatic case system’, WZKM 94 (2004), 177-183; there is also Satzinger’s forthcoming paper ‘Proto-Afroasiatic is ‘Marked Nominative’ or of Nominative-accusative Alignment’ available on his homepage since about two years, and there is also V. Blažek, ‘Traces of a common case system in Afroasiatic’, in: ‘Loquentes linguis – Studi linguistici e orientali in onore di Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti’, ed. P. G. Borbone *et al.*, 91-101, Wiesbaden 2006).

Actually even the data and proposals found in the studies which the authoress did read (pp. 72-87) demonstrate that all the cases of Proto-Semitic go back to Afroasiatic! It is really astonishing that she disregarded this evidence saying that “First, we need to avoid evaluating the features found in one branch through the lenses of another” (p. 11) which hypercritically questions the validity of comparative-historical linguistics in general. It is true that ‘comparative work on vowels hardly exists’ (p. 10) but when we find e.g. *-u* with the same grammatical function in two or more languages and the same happens in the same frame of the case subsystem with *-i* and *-a* then this is just an optimal opportunity to reconstruct the identity of vowels at least in final position! Saying that “because of such difficulties, the present study is limited to evidence from Semitic languages, even for stages for which a comparison with other Afroasiatic branches would be desirable” is an example of sharp hypercriticism. Semitists have to realize and to accept the fact that reconstructing Proto-Semitic cannot be reasonably done without comparing the data from other branches of Afroasiatic and first of all from the most archaic or conservative languages. E.g. the authoress is at loss when she starts the subchapter on Cushitic with a mention of very innovating Gawwada which has no inflectional case marking! This makes as

little sense as if someone had started a discussion of Indoeuropean case mentioning at first Afrikaans which is the most analytic, i.e. inflectionless Indoeuropean language! The most important since very conservative Beja is mentioned only later but the authoress has no idea that it has not two but three cases with genitive *-i* appearing not only in genitive constructions, e.g. *tāk-ī-t kām* ‘a man’s naga’, *ta-tak-āt-ī-t kām* ‘a woman’s naga’ but also in possessive pronouns, e.g. the 2nd sing. masc. is nominative *bar-ū -k*, accusative *bar-ō-k* and 2nd sing masc. independent possessive sing. is nominative *bar-ī-u-k*, accusative *bar-i-ō-k*, as well as before possessive suffixes when a noun is in the genitive case, e.g. *bāb-i-ók ó-sim* ‘your fathers name’ (Wedekind K., Wedekind Ch., Abuzeinab Musa, A Learner’s Grammar of Beja (East Sudan), Köln 2007, p. 40, 60, 66, 70; E.M. Roper, Tu Bedawie, Hertford 1928, p. 14, 24, 26, 32). Semitists should study the archaic Berber, archaic Cushitic (mainly ‘Afar-Saho and Beja) and Egyptian as well as archaic Chadic (mainly East Chadic, e.g. Mubi).

We read (p. 332) that “Taking the Modern Arabic dialects as an endpoint, Semitic would have gone from originally caseless and strongly head-marking to case-inflected and split, and back to caseless and strongly head-marking. This means, it would have completed a full cycle. If the reconstruction proposed here is correct, Semitic provides us with a unique example of a language family that went through several different marking types during its history”. First of all Modern Arabic dialects cannot be an end-point because some of them have preserved quite archaic features, sometimes even features that have not been retained in the Classical Arabic dialect, and, furthermore, there are living Semitic languages (in the Neo-Ethiosemitic and Neo-Aramaic branches) which are certainly more innovating than Modern Arabic dialects. The Semitic language family is certainly not unique in its evolution through different typological stages and Egyptian evolution from Old Egyptian to Coptic is a better example of a great cycle as emphasized already years ago by C.T. Hodge, *The Language Cycle*, *Language Sciences* 13, 1970, 1-7.

In my opinion two declinations, i.e. both triptotic and diptotic must be reconstructed for Proto-Semitic and probably also for Proto-Afroasiatic.

It is my sad duty to conclude that this reconstruction of Proto-Semitic without case is unacceptable and the reconstruction of the syntactic order hardly relevant and conclusive. This is not a success at all.

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