

Reviews

Aaron D. Rubin, *The Mehri Language of Oman, Leiden* – Boston 2010. Brill. XIX + 362 pp. Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics vol. 58. ISSN 0081-8461; ISBN 978 90 04 18263 9.

This is the first grammar of Mehri as spoken in Oman, the majority of speakers living in Yemen. It is not clear whether this is the only Omani variety of this language which belongs to the very archaic and thus linguistically very important Modern Semitic Languages of Southern Arabia, usually but rather controversially called Modern South Arabian which has even more controversial equivalents e.g. in French (“Sudarabique”) and in German (“Südarabisch”). Therefore the title of the book is a bit ambiguous especially since the same or very similar dialect of Mehri seems to be spoken also in the far east of the Yemen (see e.g. M-C. Simeone-Senelle, *The Modern South Arabian Languages*, in: R. Hetzron ed., *The Semitic Languages*, London 1997, p. 380 and 378, and T.M. Johnstone, *Mehri Lexicon*, London 1987, p. xi who seems to suggest that a variety of the south-western dialect spoken in Yemen might be spoken also in Oman). As emphasized by Stroomer (*Mehri Texts from Oman*, Wiesbaden 1999, p. xiv), “within Mehri itself there is a dialect variation that probably goes much beyond a simple north-south or Omani-Yemeni variation”. The decisive information has been provided by Simeone-Senelle in her 2009 paper (see p. 455 of this volume of FO) in which she says that the ‘Mehriyot’ speakers of the Yemeni Sharqiya consider their language similar to the language spoken in Oman and distinct from ‘Mehriyet’ spoken in the south.

The monograph is based on T.M. Johnstone’s texts as published by H. Stroomer but, and this is very important, Rubin has checked them using most of the audio recordings made by Johnstone. It must be emphasized at the very beginning that although the monograph (like the ‘classical’ monograph on Mehri syntax by Ewald Wagner) is based neither on the author’s field work nor a direct contact with native speakers, nevertheless it is important as it is a good example of an application of the very sound philological method combined with equally good linguistic scholarship.

The treatment of phonology is rather concise (pp. 13-30), the reader is sent to the 1997 overview by Lonnet and Simeone-Senelle (cf. Alfadly 2007, p. 125-127) and naturally enough Rubin says: "Mehri vowels are a source of considerable disagreement, and I will leave it to those who have done fieldwork to figure out the system precisely" (p. 22). Then there are chapters on pronouns (pp. 31-570), on nouns (pp. 59-75), adjectives (pp. 77-88), verb stems (pp. 89-120), tenses and 'forms' (pp. 121-171), prepositions (pp. 174-208), numerals (pp. 209-218), adverbs (pp. 219-223), interrogatives (pp. 225-233), particles (pp. 235-258) and, although inevitably syntactic problems had to be treated in several preceding chapters, there is a chapter entitled "Some syntactic features" (pp. 259-305) and the short final chapter is entitled "On Arabic forms" (pp. 309). There is an Appendix with "Corrections to Stroomer's edition of Johnstone's texts" (pp. 311-330) and a very rich bibliography on Mehri and MSLSA (pp. 331-340) to which the doctoral thesis 'A Study on the Morphology of Mehri of Qishn dialect in Yemen' by Hassan Obeid Abdulla Alfadly (Sains University of Malaysia, 2007) who used 35 informants should be added (there is also the article entitled 'An Introduction to Mehri Tongues' by Mustafa Zein al-Aidaros, *Journal for Human and Social Sciences* 1, 27-46); finally we have short selected Indices.

As far as pronouns are concerned, it would be better to quote examples of the use of the suffixed pronouns of the 1st and the 2nd person dual forms which "must be distinguished by context" (p. 34, 36, 37, 38 and 41; the same with verbs in the Perfect, see p.121). It is important that Rubin stresses the fact that the division into Ga and Gb stems does not correspond exactly to the division into transitive/active and middle/stative verbs (pp. 92-93). It is remarkable, although usually neglected by Semitists, that in Mehri, like in other MSLSA languages, there is, as far as we know, no *qattala* or D class of derived verbs, there is only *qātala* or L class (causative or simply transitive) as well as denominative verbs which is a strong argument in favor of the original Proto-Semitic *qattala/qātala* class which was multiplying and causative. I do not see a reason for labeling it "D/L" stem in Mehri since there is no D, viz. gemination. As far as the use of the imperfect as a past habitual, past continuous or imperfective is concerned (pp. 124-126), it is conditioned by an adverb: 'once' in 11: 1, 15: 10, 50: 1, 89: 3, 64: 8, 40: 3 (see also the use of the perfect in the preceding sentences!), by 'earlier/formerly' in 25: 17, by 'since those years' in 25: 19, by initial 'yesterday' in 62: 7, by 'every year' and initial 'once' in 32: 13. Also the examples on p. 126 are clearly embedded in the past tense of the whole stories and are rather examples of *praesens historicum*. See also the use of the imperfect forms with *q-* not only for present continuous/progressive but also for past progressive depending on adverbs and/or preceding perfect forms. It is not clear at all whether any traces of the Old Semitic preterit can be identified in Mehri. Therefore it should be emphasized that these are rather banal cases of the past use of the

imperfect conditioned by adverbs and by text syntax. The label “Conditional” introduced by Johnstone has its advantage in the fact that it occurs (rarely !) in conditional sentences (only four examples in Johnstone’s corpus quoted on p. 132 but see also p. 142 and p. 283!) but the disadvantage is that there are also two “*Belegstellen*” of its application in the form of ‘I wish, would like’, i.e. of the verb ‘to love’(pp.132-133) for a wish (here for a wish which cannot come true !) which is another argument for the identification of the ‘Conditional’ with Old Semitic Energetic as suggested already by Johnstone. Rubin says that “A handful of 1cs cohortatives are attested though all but one of them are mistranslated as ‘will’ or ‘would like’ in Stroomer’s edition” (p. 168). Actually I find Stroomer’s translation correct (!): Rubin’s “I should go” is as good as Stroomer’s “I ought to go” (text 28: 18), Stroomer’s “I would like to set off” is as good as Rubin’s “I should go” (text 74: 12), Stroomer’s “that lad is going to be better than I am when he grows up, so I’m going to kill him” is a bit better than Rubin’s “This boy will be better than me when he grows up, so I should kill him” (text 76: 12) since there is an immediate attempt at killing; Stroomer’s “When the people leave, I will dig up the old woman that died” is better than Rubin’s “I should, when the people have gone home, dig up the old woman that died” (text 168: 3) as this is just a conditional clause and the plan is executed shortly after it has been conceived although a translation ‘Let me dig up....’ is also possible. I find the translation “We should one (of us) act crazy and two (of us) restrain him” (p. 168, see text 91: 6) clumsy, cf. Stroomer’s clearer and basically correct version, i.e. “We should pretend one of us is out of mind and (the other – AZ) two are restraining him”. I should be a bit cautious with the criticism of Stroomer’s translation “Why should I give it (to him)” in comparison with Rubin’s “Why should I give him (it)” (p. 228, footnote 3; the sentence occurs in the text 89: 32). Rubin’s justified objection is based on the fact that it is a she-camel that is given and according to the concord rule the object suffix should be feminine but in this text the sex of the camel is immaterial and theoretically this could be an example of a neutralization of gender. As far as the interpretation of ‘whether ... or...’ is concerned (pp. 170-171), it is not really ‘Hōm... aw ..’ but only ‘aw’ (see p. 237) which matters, and here the verb ‘to want, to will’ functions only as an auxiliary verb signalling potential future action. The particle *ber* (p. 248 etc.) should be discussed rather in the chapter on ‘tenses and forms’ just after the ‘*de-* + Perfect’ paragraph (p. 149).

Rubin provides only a short account of selected Arabic loans in Mehri and Arabic *be-kem* ‘(for) how much (money) ?’ (p. 233), *bas(s)* ‘enough !’, *yā rayt* ‘would that !/I wish’ (p. 239 and 131), *ād* ‘still, yet’ (Arabic ‘ād), *wela* ‘or, or else’, perhaps also *adámme-h* ‘probably it/he ..’ (p. 243, see Johnstone 1987., p. 71), *l-agerē* ‘for the sake of, on behalf of’ (p. 293; see Jibbali ‘because, for’) and *taww* (p. 255, see Arabic *tawwan* ‘right away, at once, immediately, soon’ and cf. Yemenite Arabic *taww-* with suffixed pronouns for ‘have just’) can be added.

Let us hope that Alexander Sima's grammar of Mehri will be published posthumously. Since verbal morphology is very complex (see p. 9) and the paradigms published in 'Mehri Lexicon' after Johnstone's death contain many misprints and other mistakes we need revised and detailed verbal paradigms which can be compiled only from native informants. So far Rubin's grammar is the best grammar of eastern Mehri and thanks to its solid philological approach, i.e. systematical use of the corpus and detailed quotation of particular texts it will always be a standard reference grammar. What some linguists who had a chance to work for a relatively long time in good conditions in the field have not been able to do has been accomplished in a very satisfactory way by a linguist using philological method at home.

Andrzej Zaborski

Hans Ritter, *Wörterbuch zur Sprache und Kultur der Twareg*: (Band I – *Twareg – Französisch – Deutsch*; Band II – *Deutsch – Twareg* In Zusammenarbeit mit Karl-G. Prasse. Pp. XVIII +1069, XXIII+1128. Wiesbaden 2009. Harrassowitz Verlag.

Ritter has been conducting field work among the Tuareg since mid sixties and he is undoubtedly one of the best specialists in Tuareg studies in the world. He has also read almost everything on the subject and he always quotes his sources in a systematic way. This is the newest and the biggest dictionary of the Tuareg dialect of Berber which appears after a series of dictionaries authored or coauthored by K.-G. Prasse (including the second volume of this dictionary !) who is the great master or the dean of Tuareg linguistics. What is new ? There are two giant volumes: vol. 1 is Tuareg (rather oddly spelled 'Twareg') -French-German, vol. 2 is German-Tuareg. What is more important, both volumes but especially the second one are not only dictionaries but also a kind of the lexicon of Tuareg culture since Hans Ritter is first of all an anthropologist. This combination is not a bad thing indeed since the book offers a lot of information on the culture (including history) and 'language world' of the Tuareg. The second volume is also a kind of grammatical lexicon, since there are lemmata like 'subjunctive' (vol. 2, p. 780 which gives the definition and examples of use in sentences) although sometimes it is not easy to use, since e.g. the genitive or possessive particle is listed under the German 'des' (vol. 2, p. 150) heading without a reference to 'genitive particle' on p. 277 where there is no reference to p. 150!

In principle this dictionary should contain all the recorded words in all the known dialects of Tuareg. The compilation started with de Foucauld 's great

dictionary (Dictionnaire touareg-français – dialecte de l’Ahaggar, vol. 1-4, 1951-1952, Imprimerie Nationale de France) but selecting information Ritter relied more on its French-Tuareg supplement by J.-M. Cortade (with Mouloud Mammeri’s collaboration), Paris 1967 (Institut des Sciences Humaines – Alger) although not on the revised and enlarged (by some 50 pages!) edition Paris 1985 (INALCO) which is, as a matter of fact, not easily accessible; then he used ‘Lexique touareg -français (Niger)’ by Prasse, Goubéïd Alojaly and Ghabdouane Mohamed (second edition Copenhagen 1998) but he only mentions the greatly enlarged two volume edition of this important dictionary of the Tuareg of Niger (Copenhagen 2003) and he does not even mention ‘Dictionnaire touareg du Mali’ by Jeffrey Heath (Paris 2006, Karthala) which probably means that Ritter’s work had been completed before its appearance. Although this is not a comparative dictionary *sensu stricto*, nevertheless Kamal Naït-Zerrad’s ‘Dictionnaire des racines berbères - forms attestées’ (so far three volumes published since 1998 by Editions Peeters) should also be at least mentioned. There are useful Appendices to the first volume: special lengthy chapters on numerals, on cardinal points and bearings, time reckoning including a synopsis of Tuareg Chronicles, on poetry (including metric) and violin music of the people!

Rather inevitably there are problems with the alphabetic arrangement of words since there is no perfect solution, neither alphabetic order of roots nor alphabetic order of particular words being practical without numerous cross references. Sometimes there are small problems with glosses and their cultural context. E.g. the information that the name Imošaɣ was recorded by Barth already in 1858 and glossed ‘free man’ with its synonym *alil* deserves to be mentioned (vol 1, p. 539, see vol. 2, p. 832 for a longer discussion, see also p. 167) but there should be information that this word actually means just ‘Tuareg’ – the French gloss to Imošaɣ is correct, i.e. ‘Tuaregs’ with following ‘nobles’ in brackets but the German gloss is simply ‘adelige Twareg’ (i.e. ‘noble Tuaregs’) which is somewhat misleading, since ‘noble’ means at the same time ‘free’ and every ‘real’ Tuareg is free and noble (see also vol. 2, pp. 16-17). Here there should be a reference to Tuaregophone ‘vassals’, i.e. *imɣad* and to *eklan* ‘slaves’ in vol. 2, pp. 850-851 and 728-729. There should be also a reference to vol. 2, pp. 832-833 where, however, we lack explicit information that different variants of *amahay*, in plural *imuhay* are just variants of the same word – this is obvious for linguists but not for other people who might use this dictionary rather as an encyclopedia especially since in general encyclopedias the name of the language is usually given only in its Adrar variant as *Tamašaɣ* and on several occasions I myself have been ‘corrected’ by some laymen who rejected the northern variant *Tamahaq* which is given in the vol. 1, p. 734 glossed only as ‘language of the Northern Tuareg’ while in vol. 2, p. 832-833 it is not mentioned ! By the way: the recent edition of the ‘Ethnologue’ divides the Tuareg ‘macrolanguage’ into several languages, listing two ‘languages’ of Niger, i.e. Tamajaq and Tamajeq,

two ‘languages’ of Mali, i.e. Tamashek and Tamasheq and finally Tamahaq as ‘a language of Algeria’ – this is a deplorable misuse of the term and of the genetic classification applied in order to avoid ‘politically incorrect’ name ‘dialect’ which means a ‘revolutionary’ increase of the number of ‘languages’ in the ‘Ethnologue’ encyclopedia. Another problem in Ritter’s *opus*: in vol. 2, p. 151 the lemma ‘Dialects of Tuareg’ starts with Barth’s pioneer classification which is dated and there is only a reference to the table elsewhere ! Still another example: there is an unnecessary ‘*embarras de richesse*’ in the lemma ‘*amenokel*’ which is glossed in German as „a. oberster Chef, Herrscher, Sultan, ‘König’, ‘Kaiser’; b. oberster Chef einer Tuareg-Konföderation... der „Trommelgruppen“...; c. Nachfahre(n) der Imenan...”. The translations of the title listed under <a> are, in their majority, nothing but fancy translations by travelers and some ethnographers and their artificiality should be emphasized. Fortunately enough there is no lemma ‘Kaiser’ in the second volume ! But I emphasize the fact that most of the cultural information is well presented and very useful.

As I have mentioned, the second volume contains the first Tuareg-German Dictionary and this is the best dictionary from a European language into Tuareg. It is decisively superior to the first volume since the author has been helped by K.-G. Prasse whose cooperation is mentioned on the title page of the volume. One has to be warned that there are important differences between the transcription used in the two volumes: the transcription in the German-Tuareg part (where, e.g. <ž> corresponds to <j> of the first volume but on p. XI we still have ‘Imahagan’!) has been thoroughly revised by Prasse from a phonetic and phonological point of view and it is much better, e.g. short vowels are transcribed. The second volume is also richer in data, we find more examples of the usage in sentences, dialect comparison is much better, there is much more grammatical information, e.g. the verbs are attributed to the particular conjugations. K.-G. Prasse’s results and methods are pertinent (e.g. in the section on phonetics and phonology!) and he is mentioned as the author of the very useful grammatical sketch (pp. 1003-1089) which has been entitled by Ritter rather strangely as “Grammatik und Verbalsystem”.

Both Ritter’s volumes which are so beautiful in their layout being real pieces of art (also the publishing house must be congratulated!) have to be used by all people interested in Tuareg language and culture and doing research but every serious scholar, especially a linguist, will have to use also other main dictionaries.

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