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Bairu Tafila, Ulrich Braukämper,
Ludwig Gerhardt, Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg
and Stefan Weninger

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GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI, Università degli studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”

The Tigre language has had its share of scholarly attention since the second half of the 19th century. In 1865 Werner Munzlinger published his *Vocabulaire de la langue tigré* as an appendix to the *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae* of August Dillmann. This collection of words gathered in Massawa by the Swiss politician, diplomat and explorer can be regarded as the first scientific work in the field of the Tigre lexicography. In 2005 Musa Aron, an Eritrean teacher, clergyman and educator, completed and sent to press his *Käbt-Qalât Hūggyä Tsgre*, a monolingual dictionary of the Tigre language, which is the most recent and remarkable step in the research field unveiled by Munzinger. In the one and a half centuries between those two milestones such prominent scholars as Enno Littmann, Carlo Conti Rossini, Karl Gustav Rodén, Wolf Leslau and Shlomo Raz contributed to the study of the Ethio-Semitic language spoken by almost one million people in northern and central Eritrea. They produced collections of oral literature, grammars and vocabularies a great part of our knowledge about this language relies upon. However, all these scientific efforts, culminating in 1962 with the *Wörterbuch der Tigre-Sprache* by Enno Littmann and Maria Höfner, were focusing on the linguistic variant of Tigre spoken by the Mansä and the Māryä, living in and around the ‘Ansabā valley. In fact, due to the presence of the Swedish Evangelical Mission in the area around Galab, north of Karan, and the linguistic fieldwork accomplished in the same region by Enno Littmann as the director of the Deutsche Aksum-Expedition, this part of the Tigre linguistic area was the one Europeans became familiar with since the beginning of the 20th century.


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Ever since the time of Munzinger it has been known that there is a distinct dialect of Tigre spoken by the Beni 'Amar, the group of Beğá origin inhabiting the northern Eritrean lowlands between the rivers Bârkâ and Gas and the Sudanese belt from Kassala to Port-Sudan and Tokar. Among the Beni 'Amar sections and clans, partially still depending on sheep-breeding, the use of Tagrayat (the most correct spelling for Tigre) is widespread, even if accompanied by bilingualism in Hadârâb, i.e. the Cushitic language called by its speakers in Bedawie or in Bedawie and commonly known under its Arabic designation Beğá. The linguistic variant of Tigre spoken by the Beni 'Amar is little known. In 1982 Aki'o Nakano published A Vocabulary of Beni Amer Dialect of Tigre, a collection of words belonging to this language called hasa or hasa in Eritrea, and al-hassin, "the special (language)", by the Arabic speakers of Kassala, Port Sudan and Tokar.

A chance to greatly improve our knowledge of Tigre, specifically its dialect spoken among the Beni 'Amar, is now offered by the new novel 'Hmaninti ("Trust me") by Mohammed Ali Ibrahim Mohammed, the first work written in Tigre by a native speaker, and therefore a true literary and linguistic experiment. The author, born in 1966 in the Maryà region, in the lowlands between the Bârkâ and the Ansabà, north-west of Karan, to a family originating in northern Eritrea, speaks and writes the Beni 'Amar dialect of Tigre. My ultimate aim is to prepare a translation and a scientific edition of the novel, while in this paper I will present some preliminary results of my study of Mohammed's work. During my recent research visit to Eritrea (April-May 2006) I had the opportunity to meet Mohammed and to discuss with him many questions arising in the work process.

The novel tells the story of Walat, an Eritrean girl from a small village of Sar’it not far from the Sudanese border, in the region crossed by the two major Eritrean rivers, Ansabâ and Bârkâ, and traditionally occupied by the ‘Ad Okkud fraction of the Beni ‘Amar. Her untroubled life is disrupted by the sudden contact with war and violence. After she has to witness her family being killed and her home village destroyed, she discovers her new identity as an Eritrean patriot and decides to part in the anti-Ethiopian resistance, with the fight-name of Sarat ("flame"). Her experiences, however, let her eventually recover her trust in humanity and in power of the people to prevail over all hardships.

The literary principles of Mohammed's work are described synthetically in the introduction to the novel (op. cit.), which I commented upon in an
earlier paper. From the very beginning, the author declares the intention to produce a historical novel set in modern times: “This story, starting from a particular fiction, while it is not a story which originated either from history or from a person, is an example which explains a reality which was existing in Eritrea.” Yet, the ‘Amanini is also a political piece, a reflection over the material and cultural changes occurring in the African country: “As to its content, it is based on three big matters. Among them, perhaps there will be pieces of information which explain habits and customs of the Eritrean nation and its revolution.” The ‘Amanini is certainly a work of propaganda as well, a contribution to the recently acquired Eritrean independence, with a special attention to the role of women during the war for independence: “As to the main matters, the first explains the role of the Eritrean nation in the struggle for freedom and the atrocities of the colonization which was existing against it. As to the second, while it was not a struggle only by weapons, it shows that it was by brain, that is by cleverness too; similarly, while the colonization was not a control only over the property and the people, it shows that it was a control also over the will, the conviction and the thoughts of the people. As to the third part, it explains the role of young women in all kinds of struggle.” Finally, the ‘Amanini is a didactic book meant for all Tigre speakers, including schoolchildren and all those lacking higher education, a fact that explains the instructive tone adopted by the author at the end of the introduction: “Yet, while it is not that all these points are written one after the other in the story, for all of them I will declare later that they are present in the content of the story.”

The language of the novel shall significantly enrich our knowledge of the Tigre grammar and vocabulary. The numerous phonetic, morphological, syntactical and lexical peculiarities of the text require a close scholarly attention and genuine research that would reveal whether they are dictated by linguistic constraints, whether lexico-semantic, grammatical or pragmatic, or have been chosen by the author as stylistic devices for reasons of expressiveness. In fact, the Tigre of the novel is neither a standard language nor a vernacular, but an idiom purified and corrected: whereas the grammar rules are largely the same as described by Western scholars, the choice of phonetic and lexical elements is often made in accordance with the Beni ‘Amar use.

In this paper I would like to comment upon some of the language features of the prologue of the novel, describing Walat’s happy childhood in the pastoral paradise of her idyllic village, in the fertile region abundant in flora and fauna at the co

Since Šar’it is the meeting point of wealthy and known slope Zara and ‘Abbā kabda

According to the grammar at-C = AT and làta Since the pronunciation

flora and fauna at the confluence of the ‘Ansabā river and its tributary Zara. In keeping with the standard established in my previous publication, the transliterations are given according to the rules applied in the grammar by Shlomo Raz. Words used in forms or meanings not registered by the Wörterbuch are italicized; those completely unknown to the Wörterbuch are in bold type.

Since Šar’it is the meeting point of the rivers Zara and ‘Ansabā, and likewise it is the joining place of the regions Lower Bārkā and Sāhol as well, it is a wealthy and well-known abode of cattle. As it passes through the slope which is the meeting point of the rivers Zara and ‘Ansabā, penetrating in its interior, however, the stream gives it particular wealth and vegetation.

Orthographies like lata’atrakkab and lata’atgannan are worth mentioning. According to the grammar, we should expect lataatrakkab (from ‘atrākbā, ‘at-C = AT, and latatgannan (from ‘atganna, ‘at-C = AT), respectively. Since the pronunciation is in any case latatrakkab and latatgānn, the inser-

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tion of a glottal stop between the person marker and the verbal prefix reveals the author's intention to apply his own convention, i.e. a graphic separation between the two grammatical categories. It must be noted that the dictionaries report neither 'atrakaba from rakba (W 156-7, K-Q 66), nor 'atganna from ganna (W 588; not in K-Q). Moreover, in the second case, the relationship between ganna and the derivative stem 'atganna is not sure, since the basic form means "to exceed the measure, to be impetuous, haughty, obstinate", so that possibly we have here two different roots. As a matter of fact, earlier in the same work Mohammed makes use of the form sala'as for the numeral salas "three", with a non-etymological glottal stop between the 2nd and the 3rd radical. If this can be seen as a feature of the Beni 'Amar dialect, it should be registered together with forms like 'orot, a phonetic variant for the numeral worot "one" (Nakano 136) and 'onde for the conjunction 'ando (W 23, K-Q 185; Musa reports both variants).

Frequently words and forms employed in the novel are not registered in the Wörterbuch, or are registered with different meanings. Such is the case of the verb sagga "to penetrate", reported by Musa with another meaning (K-Q 96: 'at 'akānu ba'tra, 'ab kabalat tašabbara "to remain in his own place, to suffer with patience"). balil was already known with the meaning of "orifice of the teat, the urethra" (W 53; not in K-Q), but not with the value of "stream". Fantit, reported in the Wörterbuch as "separation" (W 667), is regularly used here with the meaning and function of fantuy "particular" (in K-Q 280 it is treated as a synonym of the participle matfantay).

The dictionaries register neither hayye, "however", different from hayye, "also, now" (W 23, K-Q 6), nor gamalat, as a synonym of the participle gamol (from gamalat: W 567, K-Q 250). On the complex 'abbā kabba "in its interior" (W 411-412, K-Q 194) it must be noted that the normative grammar gives only the form 'at kabad "in(side)" (Raz 84), e.g., 'at kabdant "in their interior".

The use of the word sabbat ("reason, cause") as a subordinating conjunction ("as, since, because") is reported both by the normative grammar (Raz 91: sabbat dangarko bāhā bal 'alye, lit. "because I was late, excuse me") and by the Wörterbuch (W 184, K-Q 77; Musa treats it as a synonym of matān, 'at 'akān "instead of, at the place of"), but here we must take note of two different syntactic uses. In the sentence bālil ... sabbat laballaf ... lahayyabā ..., "the stream ... because passes through ... it gives ...", the general rule is observed: sabbat is followed by the verb. However, in the sentence Šar'iit ... lata'atrak-kab ... sabbat tā ..., "Šar'i ... that it is the meeting point ... is the reason ..." we find a more elaborate syntax: a relative clause comes first and sabbat is followed by the copula. This analytical construction, with sabbat in the post-position to the verb, has not been registered before.

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...erbal prefix reveals a graphic separation in that the dictionary (Raz 56), nor atganna case, the relation...sure, since the haughty, obsti... matter of fact, ... sala'as for the...2nd. From this point of view, it...variant for the conjunction...nd, the variants for the...inter... and summer R+N+changes(MS) spring in+P(FS) stream while flows(MS)...and summer as long cool wind hits(MS)+P(MS) as ready here and there, gives to it a particular beauty. The writing on-zarrè for 'nde (la)zarrè reveals the assimilation of the dental stop before the alveolar fricative. The contact between the two sounds is allowed by the omission of the prefix of the verb in the imperfect (Raz 56). For (la)zarrè it should be recalled that Musa writes the basic stem of this kind of verbs with a final first order (zara, K-Q 228), the same adopted by the normative grammar (Raz 62). This use diverges from the Wörterbuch, where the final consonant of the verbs with etymological final semivowel appears always in the fourth order (zara, W 497; so the verbal form coincides with the derivative noun zara "flowing water, stream, brook"; may latafaggar 'akan "place which makes a water come out", according to Musa). Being a general rule, the same can be observed for the verb whose form is here la'i(la)fante "which does not change", listed as fanta by Musa (K-Q 280), but as fanta in the Wörterbuch (W 667).

Incidentally, for quadriradical verbs with etymological final semivowel, like the same fanta, Musa clearly reports a three-tense system fanta (perfect) (la)fante (imperfect) lafanfante (jussive), while the normative grammar only gives one form lafanfante for the imperfect/jussive (Raz 65).

An important feature of the language of Mohammed, and possibly of the Beni 'Amar dialect, is the use of "long" forms of prepositions and adverbs, resulting from the addition of a long vowel -a (apparently the feminine pronominal suffix) at the end of the "short" forms, with the consequent redu-
plication of the last consonant: 'qellā, 'uttā, 'abbā, masallā, kōmmā. Several examples of these “long” forms are also given in Nakano’s vocabulary (e.g., 'uttā: Nakana 6,41; 8,46; 8,49; 12,73; 13,78 e 81; 22,126; 'abbā: 9,57; 17,109; and so on), but it seems that we are only dealing with an alternation between free variants.

For lakallabayu the Wörterbuch gives kallaba “to expect, to hope, to wait, to care” (W 391; not in K-Q). Here, however, we are dealing with kellaba “to surround” (W 422), confirmed by the example given by Musa (K-Q 200: ‘at dəwār bet wok laga’āt ‘akān lajlāt maddaq ḥaḍīr mandaq “a short wall which is built around a house or in some other place”). One should take into account the possibility that kallaba is nothing but a derivative (C = B) from the quadriradical verb kellaba (Raz 66), so that the writing kallaba would be a mere graphic variant of kellaba, both forms being phonetically equivalent. A similar alteration between different vocalic orders can be seen in naqā “spring”, a word which is reported as naqā by the Wörterbuch (W 328), but as naqā by Musa (K-Q 150). Likewise, kābbā is reported by the Wörterbuch as “to clean a milk-vessel on the fire”, and its derivative stem kābbā (0 = C) means “to butt, to assail” (W 409); in the novel the same basic stem kābbā means “to hit” as registered by Mohammed (K-Q 194, with reference to kamba, K-Q 189).

Of the four plant names mentioned in this sentence three are known: o-bal (W 469, K-Q 227: ‘at ḡafar mabhāz labaqqal rayāyom ‘ā‘ay “long trees which grow on the borders of the rivers”, i.e., the Tamarix nilotica), ‘addāy (W 485, K-Q 221: ḡams ‘abqālat ‘ā‘ay nā‘āyε “kind of plants, being small trees”; i.e., the Salvadora Persica); and wādāy (W 430, K-Q 210: ‘at dāyin mabhāz labaqqal ḡams sa‘ār “kind of herbs which grow on the shores of the rivers”, lit. “water sons”, i.e., the Cyperus sp.); only šāsīlā is not registered as a noun by the Wörterbuch (W 205), but it is reported by Musa (K-Q 72: ‘at ḡafar mabhāz labaqqal qānī amall qaṭṭīn ‘ā‘ay “thin trees, looking like the halms of the duura (qānī), which grow on the borders of the rivers”, i.e., the Penisetum unisetum).

In the subordinate clause ‘akol šamāl kabbayukā one can notice the syntactic complex resulting from the conjunction ‘akol (W 375, K-Q 175), followed by –kā postponed to the verb (possibly to be compared with ka–; W 389, K-Q 187), a construction not given by the dictionaries. The adverb dawbe “here and there” is attested for the first time in Mohammed’s work. About gāmam “ready, mature”, not registered before, both dictionaries give the verb compound gāmam bela (or waddā) with the meanings “to be apathetic (on account of morning or sickness), to be silent” (W 548) and sa‘āna, ḡamqa, takma, bilat, bagla “to be tired, to be weak, to be sick, to want in strength” (K-Q 244). We can reconstruct an original idea of “complete,

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ended, exhausted” (ḡar strength arose.

lammā halil zara even stream Zara

’sab damānā wagala in right+P(FS) and left

’sab tartarat in turn

It seems that even the

‘Ansābā; while surround shadow alternatively in

The verbal form (l) one phonetic, i.e. the

Alasā ilā ‘ā‘ay before the pharyngeal (11 and 60); and one under the influence of

karabbit “hills”. The s

“surrounds”, while the

provided only by la‘a registered by the dicti

alternatively”, corres

Wörterbuch, from the which is explained by

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ended, exhausted" (ğamam), from which several verbs expressing the lack of strength arose.

lammā ḥallī zarā wa'ansābā Ṣārīb lamassāl karabbit

even stream Zarā and 'Ansābā accompanies (MS) it seems (MS) hills

'āb dāmānā waqalabā 'ānde kallabayā mase wafaqār

in right+P(FS) and left+P(FS) while surrounds (MS)+P(FS) evening and morning

'āb tartarata šallā la'addallā nabbār

in turn shadow distribute (FP) AUX

It seems that even the hills accompany the stream of the rivers Zarā and 'Ansābā; while surrounding it on its right and its left, they distribute the shadow alternatively in the evening and in the morning.

The verbal form (la)sārīb "accompanies" exhibits a couple of features: one phonetic, i.e. the vocalic change a > a (from mid-central to low-central) before the pharyngeal b, a fact not registered by the normative grammar (Raz, 11 and 60); and one morphological, i.e. the assimilation into the 3rd person under the influence of lamassāl "it seems", in spite of the plural subject karabbit "hills". The same assimilation can be seen in the following kallabayā "surrounds", while the grammatical accordance between subject and verb is provided only by la'addallā nabbār "distribute". The adverb lamānā is not registered by the dictionaries, nor is the adverbial complex "sb tartarata "alternatively", corresponding to 'āb tartarā "one after the other" of the Wörterbuch, from the verb tartarā "to alternate, to split, to drag" (W 309), which is explained by Musa as 'āb bilat ṣattā ('agāl lābbās, 'agāl wāraqa) "to rend/tear with strength (dress or paper)", without a reference to 'āb tartarāt or similar (K–Q 139).

\[\text{\ldots}\]

\[\text{\ldots}\]

\[\text{\ldots}\]

\[\text{\ldots}\]

\[\text{\ldots}\]
Sar'it, for the reason that it is the centre of the ascending to the highlands and of the descending in the Sàhol, the owners of camels and goats prefer it very much. Moreover, because it is known for the water abundance, vegetation, trees and groves, a lot of cattle is produced there.

The preposition ǧabat “toward” is not registered by the dictionaries, neither is the word compound āddlisaiar “groves”. Musa registers the entry dàli “land of forests” (K-Q 240).

While it is not only domestic animals, wild animals too were staying there and living there. Because over its meadows the thick forest hides their whole bodies, the wild animals were settled there without problems. Particularly, as to species like boars, guinea-fowls, hares, dwarf-antelopes and other similar to them, they were living in it in bulk as the settlements of their forefathers.

The form kullarahom exhibits important phonetic features: the form kullā instead of blla, possibly a feature of the Beni ‘Amor dialect; the articulation rāb instead of rāb, owed to the presence of the following pharyngeal fricative (Raz 11). For the word rāb the Wörterbuch gives only the religious meaning “spirit, soul” (W 158), while Musa (K–Q 70) reports both “breath, life, soul” (tañfas, hayot, nafs) and body (garōb). The words kesusan and komkarra are not registered by the dictionaries.
ascending to the highlands
camels and goats prefer it
with an abundance of vegetation
by the dictionaries, nei-
which is covered with trees
and döba, “land of forests”
sakăn šar’it hadārab watagre-mā man gabb’o ʾat daggehom
dweller šar’it Hadārab and Tagre-too though arc(3MPI) in village+P(3MPI)
lalaʾattamo ʾabbu walaʾammarrō lafarroho ʾabbu
R+say-good(3MPI) by+P(3MS) and say-bad (3MPl) R+celebrate(3MPl) by+P(3MS)
walaṭrayyaho lagammu ʾabbu walahaddago
and enjoy(3MPI) R+decide(3MPI) by+P(3MS) and discuss(3MPI)
nāy ḫabar ʾaddāt bom in common habits(Pl) have(3MPI)

The dwellers of Šar’it, though they are both Hadārab and Tagre, saying
positive and negative things, celebrating and enjoying, deciding and dis-
cussing in their village, they have habits in common.

walād šar’it bādawet wāhsāyat ʾat laballo dol hadārab
native šar’it Badawet and Ḥāsāyat while speak(3MPI) once Hadārab
wadol tagrāyath ṣgal lathāggaw ḥaddīs ṣṭom ṣʾikon
and once Tagrāyat that talk(3MPI) unusual for+P(MPI) N+COP

The natives of Šar’it, while they speak Badawet and Ḥāsāyat, it is not un-
usual for them to talk once the Hadārab and once the Tagrāyath language.

In this sentence one can remark the use of two couples of synonyms:
Hadārab and Badawet to indicate the Beğa language (tu Bedasawie or ti Bedaawie), Tagrāyat and Ḥāsāyat to indicate Tigre. As a matter of fact, Hadārab and Tagrāyat are the more common words used by the Tigre
speakers, while Badawet is an adaptation of a word of foreign (Beğa) origin,
and Ḥāsāyat is made from the word ḥāsā (indicating properly the Beni ʾAmār dialect), constructed with the suffix for the names of the language, the same employed in Tagrāyath and Badawet.

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So, even when they dance, young girls and young men, while they join all together, they play dances while mixing wəhiboč, somyä, ᶜakäš, šalil, doni and so on.

The wəhiboč, the ᶜakäš and the doni are peculiar to the Beğä communities, while the somyä and the šalil are dances of Tigre tradition. In the last sentences, one can recognize a typical attitude of Mohammed Ali, an author deeply interested in unveiling the common cultural features of the people of northern Eritrea. Whether they speak Beğä or Tigre, no matter if they are nomadic pastoralists or sedentary agriculturists, in the first place they share a common land since thousands of years, and this is more important than any linguistic or cultural difference.

Summary
The novel ‘Amanini (“Trust me”) by Mohammed Ali Ibrahim Mohammed (born 1966) is the first work written in Tigre by a native speaker. This is a true literary and linguistic experiment, which will greatly enrich our knowledge of the Tagřayt grammar and vocabulary, specifically its little known variant spoken among the Beni ‘Amor. Several phonetic, morphological, syntactical and lexical peculiarities of the text are here examined in order to reveal whether they are dictated by linguistic constraints (lexico-semantic, grammatical or pragmatic), or have been chosen by the author as stylistic devices for reasons of expressiveness. Passages of ‘Amanini are here published, translated and commented.