

TIGRE AND THE OTHERS  
LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL CHANGES  
WITHIN THE TIGRE AREA

Opening speech

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Dear colleagues, distinguished participants and guests,

Today it is my duty and privilege to welcome and thank all the scholars who have accepted to join this international workshop on the "History and language of the Tigre-speaking peoples". The very fact that about twenty specialists in the historical, philological and linguistic studies of the Eritrean area, coming from different countries, have gathered here is the best indication of the increasing scientific interest in the research on the Tigre, their language and culture. Giving attention to East Africa, particularly the Eritrean and Ethiopian regions, the Sudanese lowlands and the Nile Valley, the Somali coast and the Red Sea, is natural for an academic centre like the University of Naples, "L'Orientale". Thus, it is little surprise that the organization of this workshop has been made possible, thanks to the joint effort of the institutions governing this University: the President Pasquale Ciriello, the Dean of the *Facoltà di Studi Arabo-islamici e del Mediterraneo* Agostino Cilardo, and the Head of the *Dipartimento di Studi e Ricerche su Africa e Paesi Arabi* Giorgio Ezzani. To all of them I wish to express my sincere gratitude.

There are more institutions I wish to thank for their support to the Italian scholarship on Eritrean history and linguistics. These are the *Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* (Rome), which funded my linguistic researches, and the two German foundations which contributed to the present workshop: the *Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung* (Berlin) and the *Johanna und Fritz Buch Gedächtnisstiftung* (Hamburg).

Cooperation between Germany and Italy in the field of philological and linguistic research about Eritrean and Ethiopian cultures is well established since a long time, and recently it has produced significant works of scientific value, such as the volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, a German project to which Italian experts cooperated intensively.

Before giving the floor to the colleagues who will discuss, according to the program, the main aspects related to the theme, let me take some time for a reflection on the reasons lying behind the organization of this workshop. In the past decades, the International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies have been convened in different places following a common principle, that of bringing together scholars of every discipline related to Ethiopia, Eritrea and the surrounding areas: from history to environmental studies, from linguistics to development issues, from philology to politology. Now, almost fifty years after the first ICES, this type of event has begun to show its limitations. A gigantic and sometimes chaotic conference claiming to deal with everything about Ethiopia and Eritrea can hardly represent a real exchange of scientific information. This is why in recent years, workshops and seminars have been organized in different places, in order to provide specialists with a single and clearly defined theme and create a true opportunity for a productive exchange<sup>1</sup>. I hope that today's workshop will be such an opportunity.

A second reflection deals with the approach we chose in organizing this workshop. In our intention, the subdivision of the meeting into six sections (Archaeology and Ancient History, Linguistic classification of Tigre, Tigre grammar, Comparative linguistics, Dialectology and related languages, Language and society, History) represents the effort to adopt a specific methodology, that of the historical sciences, in the sense of archaeology, philology, linguistics and studies on literature, serving to the historical reconstruction of the internal and external facts of a community. This is nothing but a scientific choice, yet having the merit to give the studies represented here a certain degree of internal coherence.

Starting from these general considerations, it is necessary to justify the choice of today's topic, i.e. the factual and linguistic history the Tigre-speaking peoples. In fact, there should not be much need of an

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., *Ethiopia and the Missions. Historical and Anthropological Insights*, ed. by V. Böll, S. Kaplan, A. Martinez d'Alòs-Moner & E. Sokolinskaia, Munster, LIT-Verlag, 2005 (Afrikanische Studien, 25), collecting the papers presented at the workshop "Historical and Anthropological Insights into the Missionary Activities in Ethiopia: Conversions, Resistances and Compromises", Hamburg University, 25-26 July 2003.

explanation: as we know, the position of the studies on the Tigre language and history, within the broader framework of research on traditional Semitic and Cushitic cultures of Eritrea and Ethiopia, has been long recognized by the scholars. To give an example, it is sufficient to quote a statement dating to a century ago, and pronounced by a German scholar who gave one of the strongest impulses to the scientific study of Eritrean and Ethiopian regions and cultures. In the following paragraph, written by Eimo Littmann in 1907, his view about the matter we are dealing with is expressed in a sober and exhaustive way. These words coming from the past have preserved all their value and deserve to be heard as a true scientific program of research.

"Among the languages spoken in the Colonia Eritrea the Tigrè language is the most important for several reasons. First, the people using it as their mother tongue are more numerous than any other linguistic community within the Italian possessions; secondly, it is spreading very rapidly to tribes of different nationality and takes, in a way, the place of a lingua franca, competing in this respect with the Arabic in those regions; thirdly, it is of great philological interest, since it is the most archaic of the present Semito-Abyssinian languages and, although not a direct descendant of the ancient Gəʿəz, resembles the latter more than the Tigrīna, which is directly derived from Gəʿəz, and since it is almost a connecting link between the Asiatic and the African Semitic"<sup>2</sup>.

In this way, Littmann was anticipating the sense and the results of several studies carried out in the 20<sup>th</sup> cent. on the Tigre language and history. In spite of the perennial difficulties of scientific investigation in this part of the world, modern philological enquiries, archaeological surveys and comparative linguistic studies in the area where Tigre and related languages are spoken, allow a reconstruction of more complete and consistent historical pictures, also valid for different sectors of the highlands. To be more precise, as Littmann clearly understood and expressed in terms which are still valid, regional study is not a way to identify hypothetical cultural characters with temporary political claims in

<sup>2</sup> Eimo Littmann, "Preliminary Report on the Princeton University Expedition to Abyssinia", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 20, 1907, pp. 151-182; p. 155.

<sup>3</sup> The complexity of Littmann's statement can be appreciated through a comparison with the "simple" positivistic attitude exhibited by Werner Munzinger, *Ostafrikanische Studien*, Schaffhausen, Fr. Hurtersche Buchhandlung, 1864, p. 249: "Wenn ich die kleine unscheinbare Pflanze mit dem Mikroskop bis auf ihre einzelnsten Teile untersuche - dem so eine Pflanze ist das kleine Volk, das wir uns angesehen - wenn ich auch den Leser ermüde, der meinen Details folgen soll, so thue ich es mit der Hoffnung, hier und da dem an sich toden Stoff eine neue Seite des menschlichen Geistes abzugewinnen und wohl auch eine neue Wahrheit" (cp. the Italian translation in Werner Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa Orientale*, Roma, C. Voghera, 1890, p. 198).

mind, for the scientist is not particularly interested in those. The deeper knowledge of the facts related to a region, within a cultural complex, has the value of a model for a better comprehension, also of what happened elsewhere. Here, I wish to hint at some conclusion made possible by this historical-humanistic approach applied to the case of the Tigre.

The urban civilization in the regions north of Asmāra goes back to the time of Aksum at the latest, as indicated by the findings of Aratu, Rora Laba, Diqdiq, and Gälāb. The South Arabian presence in Northern Eritrea could be shown by the site of Enzälal, in the Habāb region, where building foundations, possibly with Sabaic inscriptions, were found<sup>4</sup>. The findings of the "Ona" sites, however, seem to enable us to trace the urban history back to a much older historical phase. Particularly, the material culture belonging to the "Ona Group" ware, dating approximately to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, shows affinities to both the contemporary ware of the Sudanese Nile Valley and the Tihama Cultural Complex of the South Arabian coast. This means that long before the arrival of the Sabaeans, an exchange of cultural elements between the Nile Valley, the lowlands between Sudan and Eritrea, the Eritrean highlands and the Tihama coast had already been made possible by the mediating role of the "Ona culture" of Northern Eritrea<sup>5</sup>.

Are there linguistic remnants of this very remote pre-Sabaeian phase? Was a Semitic language spoken in Eritrea from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, before the introduction of Sabaic and the development of Gəʿəz, and could this language be an ancestor of modern Tigre? The archaic features of Tigre are a real riddle for the Semitic studies as a whole. Yet, there is a certain consensus around the main idea that they should be connected with a linguistic stratum, which is older than the one represented by Gəʿəz. To the features first detected by Robert Hetzron<sup>6</sup> (the definite article *lä-*; the third person independent pronoun *hətu*, with glottal fricative *h-*; the active participle *qatal* < \**qātil*; the ablative preposition *mən* < \**minna*), recently I proposed to add the comitative preposition <sup>ʔ</sup>*ət* that can be compared with the element <sup>ʔ</sup>*et* < \**ʔitt* in Biblical

<sup>4</sup> Carlo Conti Rossini, "Antiche rovine sulle rive eritree", *ANL-Rendiconti*, ser. V, 31, 1922, pp. 241-278: p. 252; Idem, *Storia d'Etiopia*, Bergamo, I.I.A.G., 1928, p. 226 and pp. 242-243.

<sup>5</sup> Rodolfo Fattovich, "The Contacts between Southern Arabia and the Horn of Africa in Late Prehistoric and Early Historical Times: A View from Africa", in *Profumi d'Arabia, Atti del Convegno*, a c. di A. Avanzini, Roma, "L'Erma" di Bretschneider (Saggi di storia antica, 11), pp. 273-286: pp. 282-286; cp. P.R. Schmidt & M.C. Curtis, "Urban Precursors in the Horn: early 1st-millennium BC communities in Eritrea", *Antiquity*, LXXV, 2001, pp. 849-859.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Hetzron, *Ethiopian Semitic*, Manchester, U.P., 1972, pp. 19-21.

betwee<sup>7</sup>. The same absence of labiovelars could be considered meaningful, since Tigre is surrounded by Semitic and Cushitic languages which possess this phonological series (Gə<sup>c</sup>əz, Təgrəñña, Beḡa and Bilin). Their absence in Tigre could represent the legacy of an ancient phase, more than the result of an internal development, against a regional trend of the Eritrean languages as a whole.

Thus, a combination of archaeological and linguistic research, in particular that of the Ethiosemitic comparative linguistics, can offer indications for the reconstruction of both the Eritrean and the Ethiopian past. If this approach is correct, and the proposed historical dynamics makes sense, something more precise can also be said about the etymology of the word *tagre* itself. This geographical, ethnical, linguistic and social denomination, spread over a wide area from the Roras to Hamasen and beyond, could have been introduced to indicate those Semitic-speaking groups who had settled in Northern Eritrea before the arrival of the Sabaeans. As first suggested by Andrzej Zaborski, the name (first documented in the 6<sup>th</sup>-cent. scholia to Cosma Indicopleustes, *Topographia Christiana*, II 60-63<sup>8</sup>) could derive from the Semitic root \*grr, to which Ge'ez *gārrā*, *gārrā* "be subject to, obey", and Tigre *tägärrärä* "to be a vassal (*tagre*)" are related<sup>9</sup>. In this case, we can assume that the word *tagre* was originally a socio-linguistic denomination, created by the South-Semitic newcomers to indicate their predecessors.

From the early Ptolemaic period, around the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent., Greek influence over northern Eritrea, including the coastal plain and the Hamas, is attested by classical authors. This means that the historical regions of Sänhit and Saḡəl were not alien to the main cultural streams which invested the southern Eritrean highlands of Hamasen, Särä<sup>ʿ</sup>e and

<sup>7</sup> Gianfrancesco Lusini, "Note linguistiche per la storia dell'Etiopia antica", in *Studia Aethiopica In Honour of Sigbert Uhlig on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. by V. Bill, D. Nossitsin, Th. Rave, W. Smidt & E. Sokolinskaia, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004, pp. 66-77: pp. 72-73; Idem, "The early history of Eritrea: A new perspective", in *Loquentes Linguis. Studi linguistici e orientali in onore di Fabrizio A. Bonacciani*, ed. by P.G. Borbone, A. Mengozzi & M. Tosco, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006, pp. 447-454: p. 450.

<sup>8</sup> Wanda Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustès, Topographie Chrétienne*, I, (*Livres I-III*), introduction, texte critique, illustration, traduction et notes, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1968, pp. 373-379 (text) and 372-378 (translation).

<sup>9</sup> August Dillmann, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicæ, cum indice Latino*, Lipsiae, Th.O. Weigel, 1865, coll. 1155-1156; Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez*, Wiesbaden, O. Harrassowitz, 1991, p. 203b; E. Littmann, & M. Höfner, *Wörterbuch der Tigre-Sprache*, Wiesbaden, F. Steiner, 1962, p. 573; cp. Andrzej Zaborski, "Beja and Tigre in 9th-10th century period", *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 35, 1972, pp. 117-130: p. 118, fn. 9.

Akkälä Guzay, through the cost of Samhar. The program of intensive trade along the Red Sea coasts inaugurated by the Lagid rulers brought about a non-occasional Greek presence in these lands. But even in this case, the main centres of Hellenic influence on the Eritrean coast could reveal a pre-Hellenic origin, at least in their linguistic shape. The interpretation of the place-name Adulis, e.g., could give us a hint<sup>10</sup>, on the basis of the Tigre *ʿaddälä* ( $O_2 < *ʿadlā$ ) "to allot"<sup>11</sup>. From the passive participle *ʿaddul*, a basic form *\*ʿadul* can be restored, with the meaning of "(territory) allotted". The form with initial *a-* (instead of *ʿa-*) was probably determined by the Greek pronunciation of the place-name, and by the related etymological interpretation ("wanting in slaves")<sup>12</sup>. This reminds us of the etymology of the name Aksum, proposed a few years ago by the late Lanfranco Ricci, as "(territory) assigned", from the Gəʿəz verb *ʿaksämä* and its passive participle *kəsum*<sup>13</sup>.

The issue of the relationships between Tigre and the surrounding languages has not been sufficiently investigated so far. It is commonly admitted that Tigre shows a scarce influence of a Cushitic substratum both in its syntax and in its vocabulary<sup>14</sup>. According to the ancient sources, and the relevant historical frame, the hypothetical substratum could have been of Beḡa or Agäw origin. The fact that this influence is not prominent leads us to think that the Semitic ancestor of Tigre may have appeared in the regions north of Asmära before the arrival of peoples of Cushitic culture from the Sudanese lowlands (Beḡa) or from Tigray (Agäw). Again, this would suggest the existence of a remote settlement of Semitic speakers in this part of the highlands and, as a consequence, an archaic origin of their Ethiosemitic language. Possibly, the Ḥasä people mentioned in the 'Ezana's inscription RIE 189, (=DAE 11)<sup>15</sup>, was speaking an old form of Tigre, since their name recalls the term *ḥasä* or *ḥäsä* used by the Beni 'Amər to indicate the variety of Tigre they speak<sup>16</sup>. In this reconstruction, *ḥasä* or *ḥäsä* would be the same as *təgre*, and *təgre* would mean "language of the vassals" (with reference to Semitic speakers

<sup>10</sup> Lusini, "The early history of Eritrea", cit., p. 451.

<sup>11</sup> Littmann & Höfner, *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, cit., p. 483.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Plinius the Elder, *N.H.*, VI 34 (172).

<sup>13</sup> Lanfranco Ricci, "Post scriptum", *RSE*, 38, 1994, ed. 1996, pp. 188-190. Both *ʿaksämä* and *kəsum* are attested in the *Golden Gospel* of Däbrä Libanos, with the meaning "to assign a land" and "land assigned"; C. Conti Rossini, "L'Evangelo d'oro di Dabra Libanos", *ANL-Rendiconti*, ser. V, 10, 1901, pp. 177-219; pp. 186 and 189, docc. 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Shlomo Raz, "Tigre Syntax and Semitic Ethiopian", *BSOAS*, 43, 1980, pp. 235-250.

<sup>15</sup> E. Bernard, A.J. Drewes & R. Schneider, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, introd. de F. Anfray, I, *Les documents*, Paris, A.I.B.-L., 1991, pp. 30-32.

<sup>16</sup> Lusini, "Note linguistique", cit., pp. 73-75.

considered as subjects) since the times of the Sabaean expansion. In this case, *tigre* would be opposed to *gəʕəz*, meaning "language of the free men", as a sign of that linguistic and social dualism (between 'old' and 'new' Semitic-speakers) introduced in the Ethio-Eritrean history by the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> cent. Sabaean expansion.

As I mentioned earlier, it has been long recognized that some archaic features of Tigre are not explainable in terms of its genetic derivation from *Gəʕəz*. Yet, there is little doubt that all Ethiosemitic languages descend from one and only common ancestor, already reflecting such pan-Ethiopian phenomena as the compound verbs and the locative verb *\*hlw*<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, one can presume that some important features of Protoethiopic persisted in Tigre and were lost or changed in *Gəʕəz*. As we shall see in a while, a closer study of the Tigre vocabulary seems to confirm this general statement. Moreover, at least the article *lä-* and the prepositions *ʕa* and *man* are not documented in Sabaic. Thus, not only the Protoethiopic is something different from the South-Arabian dialect of Maṣāʕ, but the archaic features of Tigre could testify the existence of an ancient Semitic dialect spoken in Eritrea around the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, well before the Sabaean expansion<sup>18</sup>.

For the historical reconstruction, the exchange and the circulation of linguistic elements in and around the Tigre area is a crucial factor, which will deserve thorough investigations in the future. According to a widely accepted view, the Tigre vocabulary is particularly rich in Arabic loanwords. This statement relies upon an interpretation of the cultural history of northern Eritrea, as a land exposed – at least in recent times – to religious and linguistic influences from the Islamic centers of the Arabian coast<sup>19</sup>. But sometimes this point of view appears prejudicial. Is the similarity of a Tigre word with an Arabic corresponding form owed to a loanword, or to the fact that they are both Semitic languages?

In Tigre, the word for 'tooth, canine tooth' is *nib*, completely different from *Gəʕəz* *sann*, plural *sanān* and *ʕasnan*. Both words, *nib* and *sann*, are Semitic. Inside the Ethiosemitic *nib* is attested only in Tigre, whilst the

<sup>17</sup> Hazon, *Ethiopian Semitic*, cit., pp. 17-19.

<sup>18</sup> Paolo Marrassini, "The Semites in Abyssinia. Onomastic and lexicographical data", in *Studia Semitica*, ed. by L. Kogan, Moscow, Russian State University for the Humanities, 2003 (Orientalia. Papers of the Oriental Institute, III), pp. 141-151.

<sup>19</sup> Wolf Leslau, *Arabic Loanwords in Ethiopian Semitic*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1990, pp. 141-157; p. 141 (= "Arabic Loanwords in Tigré", *Word* 12, 1956, pp. 125-141; p. 125): "Almost all of the Tigré speakers are Moslems, and many of them speak Arabic. It is therefore, not surprising to find a great number of Arabic loanwords in the Tigré vocabulary".

other languages show forms connected with *sənn*. For *nib*, a correspondence with Arabic has been accepted, following a proposal made first by the late Wolf Leslau<sup>20</sup>. It is sufficient to consult the *Semitic Etymological Dictionary* by Alexander Militarev and Leonid Kogan<sup>21</sup> to find that in Arabic a consonantal root *\*nayab-* is indeed attested (from this root the verb *nayyaba*, 'to bite' is built), but the Arabic word corresponding to Tigre *nib* is *nāb-* (not *nīb*<sup>22</sup>), plural *'anyāb-* and *nuyūb-*. Thus, there is a certain discrepancy between the Tigre and the Arabic vocalism which deserves to be explained. Moreover, the same form of Tigre *nib* can be found in Judaic Aramaic, where the word is exactly *niba*. So, it seems that this Tigre lexeme shouldn't be explained as an Arabic loanword, according to the traditional way of thinking. Things are a little more complicated: the two words are clearly connected to the same root, but they could belong to two different Semitic strata.

The export of Tigre linguistic material into other Eritrean languages is another aspect of study that deserves more attention. Since the times of Leo Reinisch, the importance of the Tigre loanwords in the Bilin vocabulary has been stressed<sup>23</sup>. The Nara and Kunama grammars and vocabularies show traces of a pronounced Tigre influence, too. The Tigre-Nara interference affects the level of morphology, as shown by the case of the *-aay* suffix which is borrowed from Tigre *-ay*<sup>24</sup> and used in Nara for the formation of adjectives and nouns<sup>25</sup>. In the Kunama vocabulary Tigre loanwords are accepted according to a general rule of that language, consisting in the addition of a nominal vowel if the borrowed word ends in consonant, as in the case of the word *kubbáyata*, "cup", from the Arabic *kubbāyah*, through Tigre *kəbbayät*, "drinking-glass"<sup>26</sup>. These are

<sup>20</sup> Leslau, *Arabic Loanwords*, cit., p. 150 (= "Arabic Loanwords", cit., p. 134).

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Militarev & Leonid Kogan, *Semitic Etymological Dictionary. I. Anatomy of Men and Animals*, Munster, Ugarit-Verlag, 2000 (AOAT 278/1), p. 180, no. 203. The topic has been discussed by Leonid Kogan on the occasion of the lesson "Arabic Loanwords in Ethiopian Semitic: True and Alleged", held at the Hamburg University, February 2002.

<sup>22</sup> As reported in Littmann & Höfner, *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, cit., p. 337.

<sup>23</sup> Wolf Leslau, *Arabic Loanwords*, cit., pp. 141 and 143 (= "Arabic Loanwords", cit., pp. 128 and 130); Leo Reinisch, *Die Bilin-Sprache, II. Wörterbuch*, Wien Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1897.

<sup>24</sup> Shlomo Raz, *Tigre Grammar and Texts*, Malibu (CA), Undena Publications, 1983, pp. 23 and 34.

<sup>25</sup> Claude Rilly, "The Classification of Nara language", *Journal of Eritrean Studies*, IV, 1-2, pp. 1-27: p. 13, note 1, quoting the unpublished manuscript by Dawd Abushush, *A Brief Essay on Phonology and Morphology of the Nara Language*. June 1999 SOAS - University of London.

<sup>26</sup> John Abraha, "Kunama Dialects and morphology", *Journal of Eritrean Studies*, IV, 1-2, pp. 28-44: p. 37, where a form, most probably wrong, *kubbayat* is reported; see Littmann & Höfner, *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, cit., p. 411.

just two examples of how Tigre influences the surrounding languages, and – according to what Littmann pointed out one century ago – these could reflect the status of Tigre as a sort of *lingua franca* of Northern Eritrea as a whole.

In recent times, Eritrean intellectuals have become increasingly aware of the importance of Tigre. Since this language is spoken by around one third of the Eritrean population, the lack of a significant amount of publications has been perceived as a problem. Thus, a literary activity in Tigre has become to occur. A couple of booklets collecting traditional stories for children and young people were written and edited by Dässale Bäräkät: *Lif'arbi' mäsani* "The four friends", in 2004, and *ʾEt qolnä nəsbät* "Let us keep our promise" (or "Let us stick to our word of honour"), in 2005. At the beginning of 2006 the first issue of an illustrated magazine for young readers, *Takyat* "The house pillar", was published by the same Dässale Bäräkät, in cooperation with Adem Saleh Abuharish. In 2005 Musa Aron sent to press his *Kəbət-Qalat Həggya Təgre*, a monolingual dictionary of the Tigre language<sup>27</sup>, which is the most recent and remarkable step in the field of Tigre lexicography. In the same year, three poems in Tigre, with English translations, were published within a significant anthology of Eritrean poetry<sup>28</sup>. In 2007 Mohammed Said Osman published *Tənkär* "Flow", a collection of 39 poems experimenting forms – verses and rhymes – never applied before in the traditional Tigre poetry<sup>29</sup>. Last August, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> 2007 the First National Conference on the Tigre language, under the title "Uniform the use of the Tigre language in the media", was organized by the Ministry of Information in order to give a new impulse to the development of Tigre literature. At the beginning of 2008 the achievements of that conference, particularly a series of recommendations about the spelling and the correct use of Tigre in the mass-media, were published in the volume *Gäh* "Polar Star"<sup>30</sup>. Among the results of this new wave, we can now rely upon *Erütrya Haddas*, a newspaper in Tigre, whose first issue appeared at the beginning of 2008.

<sup>27</sup> *Kəbət-Qalat Həggya Təgre*, ʾəb Musa Aron lätədallä, [Asmära], Aḥtämṭi Hədrī (Hdri Publishers), Terri 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Cantalupo & Ghirmay Negash. *Who needs a story. Contemporary Eritrean Poetry in Tigrinya, Tigre and Arabic*, Asmara, Hdri Publishers, June 2005. The three authors are Paulos Netabay, Mussa Mohammed Adem and Mohammed Said Osman. The translators from Tigre to English are Adem Saleh Abuharish and Dässale Bäräkät.

<sup>29</sup> *Tənkär. Af'ar kənkum ʾəb Mähəmmədsə'id ʾUsman*, Asmära, Mäṭbəʾat Hədrī (Hdri Publishers), 2007.

<sup>30</sup> *Gäh. Mänsəḥ təgrayət-əggäl ʾət ʾemat-akbar*, Asmära, Yənayər 2008 (Asmara, [Ministry of Information], January 2008).

In 2006 and 2007, Hidri Publishers launched two publications by Mohammed Ali Ibrahim: *Kāwakāb* "Stars", a booklet about the traditional astronomical beliefs shared within the Tigre-speaking communities, and *ʿĒmānini* "Trust me", the first novel written in Tigre by a native speaker<sup>31</sup>. This work is a true turning point in the history of the Tigre language<sup>32</sup>. For the first time an ancient Ethiosemitic dialect spoken in the Barka and ʿAnsāba valleys, up to the coast of the Southern Red Sea, and used for centuries only as the medium of a rich oral literature, has been adapted to the needs of a written literary language. Certainly these are the first steps toward a significant cultural enrichment of our knowledge of the Tigre language. In order to give strength to this process, we are more and more in need of a joint effort between Eritrean institutions and European universities, both of which are interested in the growth of cultural awareness within the African countries. Moreover, real and lasting results will be attained if we assume that the historical-philological-linguistic approach is decisive. As Littmann himself first understood and put into practice, this is the only way for a correct understanding of the internal facts related to peoples and cultures. Again, I hope that this workshop will contribute to this process and its consolidation. Thank you.

<sup>31</sup> *Kāwakāb, ketbay Māḥammād ʿAli ʿIbrahim*, [Asmara, Sabur Printing Services], 2006; Māḥammād ʿali ʿIbrahim, *ʿĒmānini*, Māṭḥəʿat Hədiri (Hdri Publishers), 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Gianfrancesco Lusini, "The first Tigre novel: *ʿĒmānini* ('Trust me') by Mohammed Ali", in *XII Incontro Italiano di Linguistica Camito-Semítica (Afroasiatica)*. Atti, a c. di M. Moriggi, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2006, pp. 233-241; Idem, "Mohammed Ali, *ʿĒmānini* ('Trust me'): Linguistic features of a novel in Tigre", *Aethiopia*, 10, 2007, pp. 70-80.