

BOOK REVIEW

Archaeology: English-Amharic Dictionary. የአርኪዎሎጂ እንግሊዝኛ-አማርኛ መዝገበ ቃላት. By Hasen Said and Asamrew Dessie. Addis Abāba: Shama Books, 2010-2011. Pp. 80; illustrations. ISBN: 978-99944-0-050-8. Price: 95.00 ETB.

Based in Addis Ababa, Shama Books is an important Ethiopian publisher of scholarly literature. Since the year 2000 its production has expanded with a series of finely edited books written by prominent authors and encompassing fields from literature to social sciences and the humanities. *Archaeology: English-Amharic Dictionary* is a new contribution to the rich catalogue of the Addis Ababa publisher. Its authors, Hasen Said and Asamrew Dessie, are professionals in the fields of archaeology and heritage management in Ethiopia. Dr. Hasen Said is a trained prehistorian with a large career as a museum custodian; for many years he has been the head of the Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa. Asamrew Dessie is a trained archaeologist who has taken part in several excavation campaigns.

Archaeology: English-Amharic Dictionary joins a trend within the different scholarly fields to publish thematically oriented dictionaries to help coin a standard Amharic vocabulary for literary and scholarly writing. Thus, in the humanities and social sciences dictionaries and glossaries on oral poetry, linguistics, theatre, theory of literature and law have appeared within the last years. In the 'harder' sciences the work *የሳይንስና ቴክኖሎጂ መዝገበ ቃላት*. *The Science and Technology Dictionary (English-Amharic)* published by the Academy of Ethiopian Languages (1996) stands out. As the authors themselves emphasize in their introduction to *Archaeology: English-Amharic Dictionary*, the book emerges within a context of growing research as well as public awareness about archaeology in Ethiopia. This, however, has created its own problems. The fact that most research has been conducted by foreigners or it has been written about in foreign languages has created a situation in which the terminology employed by local authors largely relies on loanwords from English and a proper standardization of terms is missing. Additionally, when Amharic is used the trend is towards increasing confusion. So it has often been the case that authors have employed different terms to express the same meaning (the examples given by the authors are illustrative and include such terms as chopper/chopping tools, rendered as ቆራጭ and መጨፍጨፊያ; hominid, as የሰው ልጅ, ቅድመ ሰብ and ሰው አውራሽ; flakes, as ቆንጨራዎች, ጦር መሰል, ፍላፍ and ጦሮች; and cleaver, as ፋስ and የቆየ የእጅ መጥረቢያዎች). Inversely, authors have also tended to employ the same term but with different meanings or even to change the original English meaning. The *Dictionary* is intended as a tool to help fix such kind of problems. In the introduction the authors summarize the book's goals: to serve as a handy tool for students, scholars and professionals in helping them conduct their study and research and publishing in Amharic; and to have other professionals—from teachers, to journalists, to curriculum developers—and the larger public benefit from archaeological science.

The effort made by the authors deserves recognition. On the one hand, they

have been assisted by renowned scholars, such as the late Amsalu Aklilu, the leading author of the *Amharic-English Dictionary* (1973). On the other hand, as they themselves indicate in the introduction, their emphasis has been on consistency and clarity. Thus, while the dictionary is not exhaustive, the authors have focused on the frequency of use (though without mentioning their method of establishing it) of the terms in order to choose the English terms to be included in the dictionary. Moreover, effort has been put into harmonizing the Amharic terms with the English terms, and when this was not possible (e.g. with such terms as *Homo erectus*, *Homo sapiens*) a definition was provided. The *Dictionary* also gives a transliteration of the English term in the Ethiopian script and some difficult terms (chiefly those related to lithic industries) are also accompanied by an illustration.

Yet, the merits of the work must not prevent us from noticing its shortcomings. On the one hand, while the contribution of Prof. Amsalu Aklilu has been certainly helpful for the project, it is regrettable that other important reference works were not consulted. Such standard titles as Leslau's *English-Amharic Context Dictionary* (1973) and Kane's monumental *Amharic-English Dictionary* (1990), which sometimes provide terms different from those given in *Archaeology: English-Amharic Dictionary*, come to mind. On the other hand, the *Dictionary* presents a number of flaws that the scholar cannot fail to notice. For the sake of analysis they can be divided into seven categories: spelling errors; wrong filing; inconsistency; muddled classification; odd choices; wrong description or translation; and omissions. Evidently the examples given below are samples only and not exhaustive.

As to the spelling errors, some of them are not to be expected in a work of this kind. Thus, a few entries feature mistakes such as "covex sidescraper", "field archieves", and "strategraphy". Next, the alphabetical filing is far too often wrong (e.g. "alternate flaking" p. 8, "characteristic waste product" and "chipped stone artifacts" p. 21, "compression rings" and "concave edge removal" p. 23, "convergent sidescraper" p. 24, "denticulate scraper" and "digital records" p. 30). This problem could have been partially averted had the authors chosen a more analytical and 'hierarchical' organization of the concepts, such as grouping thematically related terms (e.g. the big "archaeological" cluster in pp. 10-11) under the same heading. The third flaw category concerns inconsistencies, and it is extensive, too. Thus, the criteria by which some terms (e.g. "Cultural resources", "Field Work", "Camp site") have an initial capital letter and others do not, are unclear. Perhaps more seriously, more often than not there is no agreement between the grammatical value of English and Amharic terms; thus, English verbs are sometimes translated with Amharic nouns or adjectives and inversely (e.g. ስለላዊ ጎላጽጎት for "to depict" on p. 30). In the category of muddled classification, the authors are often wrong when describing the parts of speech of the entries, in particular by mistaking nouns for verbs, adjectives for nouns, nouns for adjectives and so on (so, for instance, "to amputate", "to preserve" and "to attenuate" feature as nouns on pp. 8, 62 and 12, respectively; "data capture" is described as a verb on p. 28, but two lines below "data cleaning" features as a noun; "backed" and "coated" appear as nouns on pp. 13 and 22,

respectively). Next, and even though some may regard it as a matter of opinion, some choices made by the authors strike as odd. As mentioned above, why not group ‘cluster’ terms within the same heading, which would have prevented unnecessary repetitions and significantly improved the text’s clarity? Additionally, it is difficult to understand the need for an Amharic transcription of the English terms, when the potential readership of the *Dictionary* will be competent in English. The most important aspect of the *Dictionary* is the Amharic translation or explanation of the English terms; but even here the authors score unevenly. On occasions they provide simply a wrong description (e.g. on p. 8 where “alienation” is described as ያልተለመደ ነገር; on p. 10 “archaeological ceramic” and “archaeological discoveries” appear with the same definitions, የአርኪዎሎጂ ግኝት and የአርኪዎሎጂ ግኝቶች, respectively; on p. 11 “architectural construction” is described as የአርኪዎሎጂ ንድፈ ግንባታ). Elsewhere, they provide a new Amharic term when better terms were already available (thus, on p. 9 ቅርስ translates “antiquity” instead of the widely accepted ጥንታዊነት). Yet, perhaps the most deplorable aspect of the book, which is explicitly conceived for practical uses such as field work and academic writing, is the omission of terms that no scholarly encyclopaedia or dictionary in the fields of archaeology and heritage management should fail to include. The list of those missing terms is disquietingly long. A few illustrative and important examples are the following: antiquarianism (but “antiquarians” is given), cistern, civilization, dating (but “relative dating”), dendrochronology, ditch, dowsing, enclosure, Enlightenment, exspoliation, foundations, layer, metal detector, nationalism, pit, Radiocarbon, resistivity surveying, rock art (but “rock art site”), Romanticism, taphonomy, varves and wall.

Archaeology: English-Amharic Dictionary is an ambitious book. Considering the expanding sector of higher education in Ethiopia and the growing need for reference works, titles such as the one under review are urgently needed; they are indispensable tools for the formation of new generations of academics and professionals and also to cater to a body of non-specialized readership. Moreover, professionals working with the Amharic language (authors, translators, editors) will benefit enormously from sound reference works, particularly in the fields of the humanities and social sciences. Yet, the *Dictionary* falls short of its objectives. Indeed, the work’s ambitious goals are not matched by a corresponding level of care in preparing, editing and correcting the contents. On the one hand, the choices made by the authors appear as not ideal; this can be argued, for instance, with the loose alphabetical listing of concepts, which is oblivious of their intrinsic relations and make the consultation cumbersome and tedious. On the other hand, the *Dictionary* has far too many errors of all sorts (conceptual, orthographic, semantic); such flaws are not acceptable in a reference work that aspires to guide scholarship and the interested public. Apparently the authors cut short the necessary editing and correction stages in order to reach the market as quickly as possible. This seems to be further indicated by the lack of page numbers on several pages, such as pp. 4-7, 33, 40, 46, 50, 55, 65, 78 and 80. The hope remains that in a second edition the authors will address these indicated shortcomings and mishaps and thereby the *Archaeology: English-Amharic Dictionary* will turn into a true reference work for Amharophones

inside and outside Ethiopia in the important fields of archaeology and heritage issues.

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