

Preface

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Semitic and Indo-European: Volume I: The Principal Etymologies . With observations on Afro-Asiatic

Saul Levin

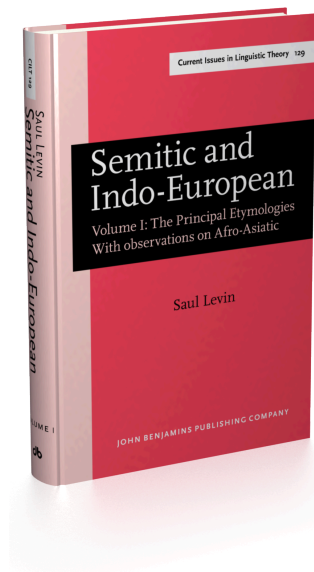
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PREFACE

In case my scattered remarks from the introduction on (pp. 3-4, etc.) leave unclear the point of the dedication to my friend Jock Brown, let me explain it here in the preface. After my *Indo-European and Semitic Languages* came out nearly twenty-five years ago, he was the one reader that truly absorbed it, to the point of sensing where it most needed to be CORROBORATED. Moreover, in the course of his own studies he came upon the very corroboration that would serve the purpose (see 1.Ac), and he wrote it up concisely but demonstratively. If not for him, I might never have found this or any equivalent evidence myself. But through his discovery I began to realize how, and with what modifications, I should resume my research into the two language groups.

The whole experience, following the publication of *InEuSeLa*, makes me also understand PERSONALLY something about the history of scholarship over the millennia: that the invention of printing, however valuable for the potential enlargement of every writer's circle, has not basically changed the intellectual condition for the advancement of knowledge. Now, as always, a writer must communicate with the mind of some individual. Unless that occurs, it makes little difference how many (or how few) copies of the work make the rounds of bookstores, libraries, or — for that matter — modern electronic networks. And while the all-important individual reader may sometimes be a stranger, I see it as no accident that this time the one with whom I could FRUITFULLY share my research was an old friend.

Jock's help to me stretches out through the years since I started working on the present book. It is mentioned on many pages of the ensuing chapters, but there is still more to it. Lately he has proofread the entire text, catching numerous misprints that had eluded me, and has also contributed many pages of the indices, which he does much better than I could.

I am grateful to quite a few other learned friends besides. Among those whose remarks have enabled me to improve many sections are Gary Rendsburg, Carleton Hodge, Roy Kotansky, and — not least — Yoël Arbeitman. Illness stopped him from reading beyond 1.Ef in his photocopy of the original dot-matrix printout, but up to that point he annotated it copiously and wisely.

Without the loving support of my wife, it would have been very hard for me to sustain the effort of research, or to resume it after health emergencies. The children too (with whom we remain in close touch since they grew up and moved away from our area) have followed the progress of this book with interest and encouragement. Our son Daniel, being in the computer consulting business, often guides me in the use of the Macintosh word-processor; he says he has found it unusual for anyone of my age to learn successfully the operation of a computer.

Last summer my cousins in Seattle, Donald and Lois Celarier, were instrumental in giving me access to *Saggi di glottologia generale comparata* by Alfredo Trombetti, the one major predecessor whose writings I had not been able to consult. Through an improvement in the international network of bibliography, which Martin Raish of the library staff here at SUNY-Binghamton brought to my attention, I became aware that the University of Washington owns the second volume of that huge work. When I visited my cousins, their friend John Sundqvist, being a part-time student, kindly borrowed it from the library so that I could study it at leisure.

I noticed incidentally that Trombetti's *Saggi* had an odd, complex history of publication, which kept it from being listed in the standard bibliographies such as the *National Union Catalog*. After that vacation trip, with much exertion James Mellone, who is in charge of the inter-library loan department here, tracked down for me all the scattered fascicles of which the other volumes of *Saggi* consist. He requested them from one library after another that reported incomplete holdings of the series *Memorie della R. Accademia delle Scienze dell' Istituto di Bologna, Classe di Scienze Morali*. Finally, thanks to Mr. Mellone, I was able to locate almost everything pertinent to my research that Trombetti had noted before me, either in *Saggi* or in his briefer works.

I came to appreciate the kinship between Trombetti and me. Both of us, though growing up in a monoglot home, were devoted linguists from childhood on; we began by teaching ourselves French out of a book. But beyond that he surpassed me by far as an autodidact scholar; for he had come from a very poor, illiterate family and struggled long and hard to reach the rank of professor at the University of Bologna, whereas I had a comfortable childhood and a fairly smooth career afterwards. Much as I admire him, I must state that he somehow missed the details which have been crucial to me. Perhaps his searches through the languages of the whole world were too broad and ambitious. He never had time to learn any of the Semitic languages well enough for his own purposes; in particular, his mistaken conception of Hebrew phonology

kept him from grasping the most significant links to Indo-European. Still I wish I had come across his works much earlier.

I owe the most special thanks to Konrad Koerner, not only for the prompt acceptance of this book to join that renowned series, *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, but since then for sharing with me his expertise in laser printing, in which I am altogether a novice. Yola de Lusenet too, of the John Benjamins Publishing Company in Amsterdam, has given me much practical advice, together with encouragement, as I labored to produce the camera-ready pages. With their high standards they set a mark for me to improve my skill in typography. For without that my accomplishments in linguistic research cannot be brought to the eyes of readers; and no professional typographers, in Europe or elsewhere, are familiar with the gamut of characters — Greek, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Arabic, Cyrillic, phonetic — all necessary for the clear presentation of my comparative linguistic data.

Time after time, when the software or the laser printer or something else had me utterly baffled, I was rescued by Tom Blake, the computer genius of our university. Besides the fonts bought for my use by the university administration, he found several other fonts that are in the public domain and have served me better than any alternative. I could not have even begun this huge typographical job without having him on call; but eventually he got me to the point where I could sometimes find the solution to a typographical or electronic difficulty by myself. I also thank Mrs. Geraldine MacDonald, who directs the computer center and has made sure that for my long, slow task I should have full access to their equipment, even during vacations when the center was closed.

Since 1966, when the State University of New York Press decided to publish my *InEuSeLa*, I have experienced the revolutionary change in the production of books that require complex linguistic typography. A staff of five in Albany — later six — was kept busy for nearly a year, making the roughly eight hundred camera-ready pages of that book. Even so, with the Vari-Typer in my office I had to supply them with all the Hebrew and phonetics; item by item, these were pasted onto measured blank spaces by the staff in Albany. My colleague and friend, Prof. Khalil Semaan, generously copied out the Arabic for me on his typewriter; and an acquaintance was hired to do the same with the Sanskrit. These items too had to be pasted in.

Now it has also taken me nearly a year, working ALONE, to reformat for laser the entire dot-matrix draft of this book and to produce some five hundred camera-ready pages, containing a lot more Arabic and a considerable amount of Cyrillic. The electronic fonts serve far better than anything available to me in

the past. Notably, the Vari-Typer Hebrew — although on the whole clear and handsome — lacked accents; I called on Stanley Kauffman, the young graphic artist on our campus, to fill in thousands of accents by hand. But now I do all that myself on the word-processor. I still need Mr. Kauffman, though only for occasional odd characters, which occur on eight pages in all — a Syriac vowel-sign, an archaic Greek letter, an Ugaritic cuneiform character, etc.

On many pages something is less elegant than I would like, but my readers should understand how hard the typographical work has been. The phonetic fonts are especially troublesome. Though better than any other phonetic fonts within my experience, they are prone to uneven spacing. Moreover, they were designed only for 12-point lines; and while I have succeeded in enlarging them to 14 and reducing them to 10, or even to 8 when necessary, often the results are not very neat. So I have to make *LEGIBILITY* my first rule; if that is achieved, I ask everyone to excuse the letters that are too close together or too far apart, and whatever else may be ungainly.

S. L.

Binghamton, March 1995

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AmJoPh = *American Journal of Philology*.

AsDi = *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. University of Chicago Press, 1965–. Commonly abbreviated *CAD*.

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