

Preface

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PREFACE

The papers which make up the contents of the present volume constitute the proceedings of the Third International Hamito-Semitic Congress, which took place at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, from the 29th to the 31st of March 1978. The earlier congresses in the series were held in Paris (16-19 July 1969) and Florence (16-18 April 1974), and the fourth will take place at Marburg from the 20th to the 22nd of September 1983.

Since their initiation fourteen years ago these international congresses have provided a forum and one of the principal stimuli for research into the historical evolution of, and postulated genealogical relationship between, the so-called Afroasiatic or Hamito-Semitic languages. During this period considerable progress has been made in comparative reconstruction within Chadic and Cushitic so that it is now becoming increasingly possible to place reconstructed forms from these families alongside those of for instance Semitic or Ancient Egyptian which, with their long written traditions, have the benefit of much earlier documentation. It is the steady flow of this new material which gives the field of Afroasiatic studies much of its current interest and motivation and which will provide an opportunity for alternative analyses, particularly as regards retention and innovation, within the postulated Afroasiatic language family as a whole.

The papers in this volume, loosely grouped according to language families and theoretical issues, are in a number of cases considerably expanded and up-dated versions of those delivered at the Congress. The papers of the earlier part tend to be more substantive and to present primary evidence, the subsequent ones focus more on specific issues within particular languages, are surveys of the field, or deal with questions of methodology. Taken together they provide, I think, a very good idea of the current state of affairs in the subject.

J.B.