

Foreword

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/z.145.01for>

Pages ix–xii of

**In Hot Pursuit of Language in Prehistory. In honor of
Harold Crane Fleming : Essays in the four fields of
anthropology**

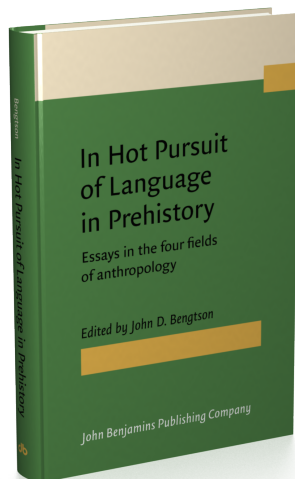
Edited by John D. Bengtson

2008. xxiv, 476 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights



Foreword

Harold Crane Fleming (hereafter, “Hal”) was born the 23rd day of December, 1926, in Winsted, Connecticut. Hal was the youngest of four children to parents of Scottish and New England Yankee stock. Hal was born into a wealthy home, but soon the Great Depression arrived and his father lost his fortune, his parents divorced, and Hal and a sister were supported by his mother, who worked as a “sales girl.”

By his own account Hal “flunked out of kindergarten” because he hated to read. But this propensity was soon to change radically, because across the street from the family apartment in Winsted “was a good public library with circa 20,000 volumes. Where else could a lonely little boy with no money and no friends hang out after school? It took very little time to get over the hatred for reading because some kind of paradise had just opened up. The library was rich in history books, geography books, historical novels and stories. Thus was born the makings of an anthropologist with an interest in historical approaches. Winsted with its many ethnic groups living harmoniously together provided the other element, an interesting society or the last element needed to make an anthropologist.”¹

After attending elementary and secondary schools in Winsted Hal was drafted into the Navy in early 1945 and trained as a radio operator in the amphibious forces which were meant to invade Japan later on that year. Instead the atomic bomb intervened and saved Hal from what could well have been a violent death or injury. Also fortunate for him was a program called the GI Bill of Rights that paid for four years of college for military veterans.

Hal enrolled in Yale University (Yale College; Jonathon Edwards) and attained the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1951. Hal continued his post-graduate studies at Yale (1953–1963), passed the comprehensive examinations in anthropology (1955) and was admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. (now = MPhil) the following year. By this time Hal was married, to Barbara Anthony, and had a child, Leslie, so it was necessary to support the family by working 20 hours a week for a land surveyor. This skill also served him later when he served as Chief of Party of a land survey group in Ethiopia (1958–1959).

1. This is excerpted from Hal’s “Autobiography of a Lucky Man.”

After field research, supported by the Ford Foundation, in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, Congo, and Rwanda (1957–1960), Hal was admitted to Graduate School at the University of Pittsburgh, passed comprehensive examinations in anthropology in 1964, and was granted the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1965. His dissertation topic for the Ph.D. at Yale and Pittsburgh was “The Age-Grading Cultures of East Africa: An Historical Inquiry.” Hal’s major doctorate adviser, at Yale and at Pittsburgh, was George Peter Murdock. During the latter part of his graduate studies Hal served as a Graduate Assistant in the Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh and as Ogden Mills Fellow, American Museum of Natural History, New York.

In 1965 Hal began his long career at Boston University, first as Assistant Professor of Anthropology, then as Associate Professor of Anthropology and Research Associate in the African Studies Center, Boston University (1971–1988), and continuing to this day as Research Fellow in the African Studies Center and Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, Boston University (since January 1989). At various times Hal taught the following courses: Anthropology (Introductory, Cultural, and Social), Primitive Religion, Ethnology of India, Ethnology of the Middle East, History of Anthropology, Theory and Method (Anthropology), Peoples and Cultures of Africa, Ethnology of Northeast Africa, Languages of Africa, Historical Linguistics,² Description (Field Methods) in Anthropological Linguistics.

Early in his career at Boston University Hal published a paper that outlined an important taxonomic discovery, his proposal that what had up to then been known as the “Western Cushitic” language family was not a part of Cushitic at all, “but rather constitutes a sixth primary branch of Afro-Asiatic, for which he suggested the name Omotic.”³ Solving taxonomic problems with African languages, and worldwide, has continued to be a major theme of Hal’s work.

In August of 1986 Hal had an experience that came to significantly shape his activities for the following two decades. While attending the Ninth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Moscow he “accidentally” met the young members of the “Moscow Circle” of historical linguists.⁴ Hal was deeply impressed by the “long range

2. With internal focus on Phylum Linguistics (also called Paleolinguistics or Prehistoric Linguistics).

3. “The Classification of West Cushitic within Hamito-Semitic.” *Eastern African History. Boston University Studies in African History*, ed. by D. McCall, N. Bennett, and J. Butler, III: 3–27. 1969. The quote is from Merritt Ruhlen, *Guide to the World’s Languages. Vol. 1: Classification*. Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 89.

4. The Moscow Circle at that time consisted of A.Y. Aikhenvald, A. Belova, V.A. Dybo, E. Khelmsky (Helimski), A.Y. Militarev, S.L. Nikolayev, I. Peiros, V. Porkhomovsky, S.A. Starostin, O. Stolbova, V. Terent’ev, T.L. Vetoshkina, N. Zhvania. As mentors they looked to I.M. Diakonov (Diakonoff), A.B. Dolgopolsky (Haifa), and the late V.M. Illich-Svitych. Another member,

linguistic probing ... of scholars in Moscow who were trying to extend genetic taxonomy of human languages beyond the levels achieved in the 1950s and 1960s.” Since Hal was the only American in the linguistic section of the Conference he was selected by the Moscow Circle to be their “representative” to western scholars.⁵

Beginning in the fall of 1986 Hal began discharging this duty by circulating letters to a large number (ca. 75) of linguists and anthropologists outside of Russia. The second and third letters were labeled Circulars, and by the fourth issue (November 1987) the newsletter had acquired a more formal appearance, the name *Mother Tongue*,⁶ and the *Anči* symbol (the mother figure, with a ceramic jar on her head) that has graced every issue of *Mother Tongue* (Newsletter or Journal) since.

In 1989 what had been the “Long Range Comparison Club” was legally incorporated as the Association for the Study of Language In Prehistory (ASLIP), a non-profit corporation. Hal has served as President of ASLIP (1988–1996), Secretary-Treasurer (1996–98), Vice-President and Acting Treasurer (2004 – present), and Member of the Board of Directors (1998 – present). ASLIP’s mission is “to encourage international, interdisciplinary information sharing, discussion, and debate among biogeneticists, paleoanthropologists, archaeologists, and historical linguists on questions relating to the emerging synthesis on language origins and ancestral human spoken languages.”⁷

In 1989 and 1990 Hal took another trip to Ethiopia for linguistic field research, primarily “to fill out the parameters of the Omotic group.” One of the languages discovered on this trip, Ongota (a.k.a. Birale), turned out to be a taxonomic puzzle. Some experts have considered it Nilo-Saharan (with numerous loans from Afro-Asiatic), some (including Hal) have placed it in Afro-Asiatic at some level, and others have regarded it as a mixed or pidgin language. As this volume is being prepared we hear that Hal’s new book on the language has been published.⁸ In Hal’s words, “it features Ongota as a major sub-phylum of Afro-Asiatic and its presence as decisive in arguing for an Ethiopian homeland for that phylum.”

Hal is the father of four children: Leslie, Sara, Jennifer, and Alexander. Since 1982 Hal and his wife Nancy (née Meister) have lived in the legendary fishing and quarrying

V. Shevoroshkin, was already in the U.S. (Ann Arbor) by this time, and Mark Kaiser was an early American associate of the Moscow Circle.

5. In reconstructing this history much is owed to a letter from Hal Fleming to Edward C. Carter (American Philosophical Society) in March 1987, as well as the circular letters mentioned below.

6. The title *Mother Tongue* was invented by V. Shevoroshkin.

7. Further particulars can be found on the ASLIP website: <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/aslip.html>.

8. *Ongota: A Decisive Language in African Prehistory*. Wiesbaden. Otto Harrassowitz Verlag. 2006.

towns of Rockport and Gloucester, Massachusetts. Intensely interested in politics, Hal has served as a member of the Gloucester Democratic City Committee and Ward Chairman of the Democratic Party for the 4th Ward (2002–05).

As an adherent of the Four Field School of American Anthropology, Hal is conversant in physical anthropology, linguistics, archaeology, and cultural anthropology, as well as many other spheres of intellectual endeavor. He has told me that sometimes scholars in each of the four fields have not been aware of his participation in the others, thinking of him exclusively as one of themselves. This typifies another major theme of Hal's academic life: the ability to move comfortably among and through all the different disciplines touching on human prehistory, and the ability to *get scholars to talk to each other*, whether it be across the chasm between East and West, or across the sometimes impenetrable and artificial walls between scientific disciplines. We are all the richer for having been able to know and work with this remarkable man. Well done, Hal, and continued *buona fortuna!*

The origin of this book's title

"[Aharon] Dolgopolsky and his students and Carleton T. Hodge inspired me and others to join in the hot pursuit of deep human prehistory. Ducking the stones thrown by the pettifoggers, we find the whole exercise quite exciting and wonderfully fruitful. Is that not what science is supposed to be?"

Reference

Harold C. Fleming. 1999. Review of Aharon Dolgopolsky, *The Nostratic Macrofamily and Linguistic Paleontology* (1998) and I. Hegedüs, P.A. Michalove & A. Manaster Ramer (eds.), *Indo-European, Nostratic, and Beyond: Festschrift for Vitalij V. Shevoroshkin* (1997). *Anthropological Linguistics* 41:3.417-426.