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*Functions and Formal Stylistic Features of Kafa Proverbs.* By Mesfin Wodajo. Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing Group, 2012. Pp. 112.

This collection and study of 130 Ethiopian proverbs is welcome as the very first publication analyzing the proverbs from a language of the Omotic language family. The only other proverb publication from Omotic is a collection of Wolaitta proverbs translated into Amharic, *Wolaytāto Lemsuwa* by Getachew and Tsägaye (1987 Ethiopian calendar).

The author is a native speaker of the Kafa language, which is spoken by over 800,000 people in southwest Ethiopia. The book contains a long introduction to the Kafa people, the study of folklore, and a review of proverb study, reflecting the pattern of Ethiopian scholars writing broad introductions. The book also gives the circumstances in which certain proverbs were recorded, such as an elder cautioning a youth not to antagonize a rich man (p. 57); this makes the book so much more than simply a list of proverbs.

The author is to be congratulated for the first published discussion of poetic features of proverbs in any Ethiopian language. He cites examples of rhyme at the beginning and end of couplets, also alliteration of consonants and even whole syllables. Combinations of poetic art are seen in examples such as *Ittonaa ittoona kechee kechiye wone* “‘Respect and stew come out of a house,’ it is said” (p. 106). Note also “Bushecho girecho / bunecho nuushesho” ‘Hen drinks what has to be eaten/ and eats what has to be drunk’ (p. 85). Note also the word initial nasal consonants (m and n) in the following: *Mame ne maacooyich / nallibe na magooyich* ‘Eat for your stomach, judge for your house’ (p. 69). Note also the multisyllabic similarities of the final word in each clause.

The author clearly believes that Kafa proverbs reflect the society’s values. He organized them under categories, such as atti-

tudes toward agriculture and forestry, righteousness and wisdom, and kinship solidarity. For example, laziness is condemned by the proverb “[while] Waiting for others’ oxen, do not forget your hoe.” The value of “righteousness” is seen in “Going on the right road never makes one’s mother to be insulted.” Such proverbs are used to “reflect”, “correct”, and guide”.

Kafa proverbs lead us to think about what constitutes a “wellerism”. Kafa has examples of standard wellerisms, e.g. “‘Fearful [one] has many sticks,’ said the dog” (p. 112). However, many more Kafa proverbs consist of a quotation without a specified speaker, e.g. “‘Though the cock crows, it cannot open the door,’ said someone.” Some, the author explains as passive (“it is said”), but he classifies all as wellerisms (p. 90). How should such quotation proverbs be classified?

Twelve of the 25 proverbs under “Social criticism” (p. 98, 99) have such an unspecified speaker. For example, “‘Regret and tail are at the back’, it is said”. In a society that does not favor open confrontation, “Social criticism” is often best served by proverbs that reflect the wisdom of broader society, rather than individuals seen as openly asserting their own views.

A proverb from a former social context is still in use today, but with a different meaning: “The ox that tills the land eats straw/ the dog eats bread.” This metaphor originally referred to feudal landlords who collected taxes and labor from tenant farmers up until the 1974 revolution. “But it is not exclusively historical, because still the Kafa people use it to criticize” greedy people (p. 83).

Kafa people are still creating new proverbs. For example, “‘One who is lucky turned his hair gray, one who hid himself fathered children’ it was said” (p. 56). This refers to a time in the 1980’s when young men were rounded up for the civil war. Those who hid survived, later fathering children.

Collections such as this allow readers to study Kafa proverbs for content. For example, I found approximately twice as many proverbs about chickens (including cock, hen, chick) as proverbs about any other animal. Cattle (ox/cow) and dog came second. As has been found in other languages, animal proverbs mention animals that are common in people’s lives. The characteristics of common animals are used symbolically (p. 90), e.g. chickens are generally weak and troublesome. This is the first collection of

Ethiopian proverbs I have read that did not include any about donkeys or hyenas, though both are common in Kafa areas.

The book contains much that is fascinating and useful for proverb studies, but other material also. Ethiopian proverb scholars should look for a wider variety of models.

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