Non-European Internationality and Oral Geography

Seetzen's Encounter with Tigriñña[*]

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Abstract

Seetzen's word lists of African languages, compiled during his stay in early 19th-century Cairo, contributed to the expanding interest in global linguistic diversity at the time but were long overlooked and only recently rediscovered as historically significant. This paper examines his encounter with Tigriñña – spoken in the northern Ethiopian highlands and modern-day Eritrea – which was then virtually unknown to European scholars. His documentation drew on Cairo's multi-national diversity and Egypt's wide-ranging connections, based on conversations with travelers from Northeastern Africa, including a Tigriñña speaker. The dialect, likely from central Tigray and influenced by Muslim terminology, contains valuable cultural insights. Notably, the word list includes geographic and ethnic references that reflect an 'oral geography' still relevant today, as recent research confirms.

Key Words

Non-European internationality; Oral geography; Tɨgrɨñña; Tɨgray; Northeast African travelers; Ethiopian Studies; Research history; History of language documentation.

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I. *Introduction*

Before Seetzen disappeared in 1811 in Yemen on his daring journey to the Orient and Africa, he regularly sent transcripts of his research results to Europe, thus contributing to the steadily growing stream of information on the languages of the world.[1] Of particular importance was certainly his transcription of a sixth century Old South Arabian inscription from Himyar that ultimately led to decipherment of this previously unknown ancient script.[2] His transcripts of north-east African language samples from Cairo – where Seetzen stayed from 1808 to 1810 – are far less known, however, because they were much less influential in terms of later scholarship. Most of them were published only after his death[3] in a rather

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[1] See the catalogue of Ethiopian manuscripts and documents in Berlin by AUGUST DILLMANN, *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, vol. III: *Verzeichniss der Abessinischen Handschriften*, Buchdruckerei der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1878, p. 75–76. Under Dillmann's no. 87 there is an overview of the « Originalien von Dr. Seetzen's in Kahira eigenhändig aufgenommenen Afrikanischen Wörtersammlungen », a 30-folio manuscript containing the word lists (464 items in the language of the Berber and the inhabitants of « Dúngalá al adschûs » in the kingdom of « Sennâr »; 750 items in the language of « Szauaken »; 54 items in the language « Tahâsse » spoken in « Massaúa »; 744 items in « Tiggrý » spoken in the town of « Haúasá »; 48 items in « Galla », spoken « west of Habbésch »; 79 items in « Argubba in Habbésch »; 613 items in the language of the inhabitants of « Móbba », called « Dár Szeléh » by Arabs and « Bargu » by the Furii; and notes on the country of the « Schüllúk » and their language, followed by a word list of that language with 86 items; 665 items in the language of the « Neger von Dâr Fûr »; 753 items in the language of « Áffadéh » in the country « Burnu »; notes on the country of « Bagirma », followed by 110 items in that language; 689 items in the language of the « Phálatija » Arabs living south of Tripolis and « Fesân »). Ibid., p. II, notes that this manuscript had probably been given to the Royal Library of Berlin by Johann Severin Vater, the editor of the academic journal *Allgemeines Archiv für Ethnographie und Linguistik* and publisher of a part of Seetzen's material, or had been transferred to the Library together with parts of Seetzen's library. Vater describes in his book (JOHANN SEVERIN VATER (ed.), *Proben deutscher Volksmundarten, Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass, und andere Sprach-Forschungen und Sammlungen, besonders über Ostindien*, Fleischer, Leipzig 1816, p. VIII–IX) how he got these documents.

[2] NORBERT NEBES, « Ulrich Jasper Seetzen im Jemen », in HANS STEIN, *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811): Leben und Werk. Die arabischen Länder und die Nahostforschung im napoleonischen Zeitalter*, Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek Gotha, Gotha 1995 (Veröffentlichungen der Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek Gotha, 33), p. 39–52, and the more recent publication NORBERT NEBES, « Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811), Forschungsreisender und Sammler im Auftrag der Gothaer Herzöge », in ANGELIKA GEYER (ed.), *1846–2006, 160 Jahre Archäologisches Museum der Universität Jena, Thüringer Sammlungen im Kontext internationaler Netzwerke*, Jena 2008 (Jenaer Hefte zur Klassischen Archäologie 7), p. 76–94; see also on the importance of Seetzen's discovery for the decipering the Ancient South Arabian script in the 1840s: NORBERT NEBES, « Inscriptions: Epigraphic South Arabian Inscriptions in Arabia », in SIEGBERT UHLIG et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. III, Harrossowitz, Wiesbaden 2007, p. 153–154, here p. 154.

[3] Only the word list of the « Gibbérty » (Jeberti) in Yejju was published in his lifetime (see the in-depth discussion of Seetzen « the collector of languages »: ANGELIKA JAKOBI, « Seetzen der Sprachensammler », in DETLEF HABERLAND (ed.), *Der Orientreisende Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und die*

marginal publication.[4] In his own time, Seetzen's studies of African languages were, however, well received and discussed among scholars at least for a short time, among others by Alexander von Humboldt, who mentioned « the research carried out by Seetzen and Vater » when he reported – in his important work *Vue des Cordillères* of 1810 – that there were « over 140 languages » in Africa. This shows

Wissenschaften, Isensee, Oldenburg 2019 (Schriften der Landesbibliothek Oldenburg 69, Oldenburger Forschungen, N.F. 35), p. 265–298: « Nur eine der 14 Wortlisten, das 'Wörterverzeichnis aus der Sprache der Gibbérty in dem Lande Jédschu in Habbesch' ist noch zu Seetzens Lebzeiten in der von Freiherr von Zach herausgegebenen wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift *Monatliche Correspondenz* im Dezember 1809 publiziert worden »). ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN, « Über das Land Jédschu in Habbésch, die Gibbérty und deren Sprache », in *Monatliche Correspondenz zur Beförderung der Erd- und Himmelskunde* 20 (December 1809), no. XLV, p. 541–563 (= ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN, *Sämtliche gedruckte Schriften*, 6 vols., ed. by DETLEF HABERLAND in cooperation with BERNHARD KWOKA, Isensee, Oldenburg 2017, vol. V, p. 243; interestingly, Seetzen refers here also to the 18th century traveller James Bruce, who – as JAKOBI, « Seetzen der Sprachensammler », notes – had published himself samples of seven Ethiopian languages in 1804).

4 [ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN], JOHANN SEVERIN VATER, « Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass: Wörter-Sammlungen aus Nordost-Afrikanischen Sprachen von den Dúngalá und Berber, von Suaken, Massua, Háuasá, Argubba, von den Galla, Schiillûk, von Mobba, Darfûr, Áffadéh, Begirma, verglichen mit Arabischen, Aethiopischen, Amharischen, und mit Salt's Wörter-Sammlungen », in JOHANN SEVERIN VATER (ed.), *Proben deutscher Volksmundarten, Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass, und andere Sprach-Forschungen und Sammlungen, besonders über Ostindien* [= a collective volume with diverse studies of German dialects, languages from Eastern India among others and documentations of African languages by Seetzen], Fleischer, Leipzig 1816, p. 245–350 (here: « Wörter und Redensarten in der Sprache der Berber und der Einwohner von Dúngalá el Adschús im Königreich Sennâr », p. 247–262; « Wörterverzeichnis aus der Sprache von Szauaken » [Vater remarks, p. 276, that the comparison with Salt's material shows that this is the language of the « Adareb » and « Bischarin », i.e. Beja], p. 263–279; « Proben von der Sprache Tahâsse, welche man in Massáua und in dessen Nachbarschaft redet », p. 280–281; « Sprache von Tiggrý, welche in der Stadt Háuasá gesprochen wird », p. 282–300 [Vater remarks that there is a similarity with the language of « Massáua » and that this corresponds to the « Tigreisch » found in Salt's material, p. 295]; « Proben von der Sprache von Argúbba in Habbésch », p. 301–303 [VATER, p. 303, notes the close connection with the « Tiggry » language]; « Sprache der Galla westwärts von Habbésch », p. 304–305 [VATER notes that this is a variant of a different « tribe » than the one for which Salt had documented some vocabulary, but was closer to the vocabulary published by HIOB LUDOLPH, p. 305]; « Wörterverzeichnis aus der Sprache der Schüllûk », p. 306–307; « Verzeichniss von Wörtern und Redensarten aus der Sprache von Móbba, welches Land von den Arabern Dâr Szeléh, von den Furij aber Bargu genannt wird », p. 308–318 [VATER compares some of the vocabulary with « Phellata », i.e. Fulbe, p. 318]; « Wörterverzeichniss aus der Sprache der Neger von Dâr Fûr », p. 319–333; « Sprache von Áffadéh im Reiche Burnu », p. 334–347; « Wörterverzeichniss aus der Sprache der Einwohner von Bagírma », p. 348–350; these lists are followed by word lists of American languages. AUGUST DILLMANN, *Verzeichniss der Abessinischen Handschriften*, p. 76, referred to this publication. Nevertheless, it has rarely been quoted (see the mention in RED. [=MARIA BULAKH, GIORGIO BANTI et al.], « Research: Linguistic Research », in SIEGBERT UHLIG et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. IV, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 374–376; only recently Seetzen's studies of African languages became again more visible since their republication in ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN, *Sämtliche gedruckte Schriften*).

that Seetzen's studies were circulating as manuscripts well before their publication.[5] A recent study showed that out of fourteen African languages documented by him, « twelve were first documented by Seetzen ».[6] Seetzen produced a number of word lists, among which there is a short documentation of Tɨgrɨñña vocabulary, the northern Ethiopian language of Tigray and of the old adjacent provinces such as Ḥamasen, ʿAgame, Wejjerat etc. (not unified under one province or princedom in that time). This language and its dialects were not really studied until several decades later when travellers such as Lefebvre and several Protestant missionaries reached Tigray in the 1830s and 1840s. Following these first encounters with Tɨgrɨñña, German Semitic philologists slowly began to discuss this language, while around the same time missionaries started their translation work with the support of local theological scholars. Seetzen's Tɨgrɨñña word list was in fact never used for research, and, moreover, phonetically quite unclear and inexact, although he obviously strove for some accuracy.

Nevertheless, it is worth taking a closer look at Seetzen's word lists of different languages of northeastern Africa, which generally have been rarely used in research thus far. He documented word lists of languages that he calls « Tiggrý » (i.e. Tigray, today usually called Tɨgrɨñña), « Gibberty » (in fact Amharic, spoken by a Muslim Jeberti)[7] and « Argubba » (which corresponds to the Ethiopian

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[5] Quoted after EBERHARD SCHULZ-LÜPERTZ, « Alexander von Humboldt und Ulrich Jasper Seetzen – Auf den Spuren eines Helgoland-Briefes », *Internationale Zeitschrift für Humboldt-Studien – International Review for Humboldt Studies* XXIII, 44 (2022), p. 95–130, here p. 123. Just before the departure to his year-long journey, Seetzen had published a detailed plan of his projected travels into Africa in a periodical published in Gotha, which assured him the attention of scholarly circles of his time: ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN, « Reiseplan ins innere Africa », *Monatliche Correspondenz zur Beförderung der Erd- und Himmelskunde* 6/1802, 13/1802, p. 126–159; 20/1802, p. 201–232; 30/1802, p. 317–342; 42/1802, p. 401–426; 56/1802, p. 513–524.

[6] JAKOBI, « Seetzen der Sprachensammler » (« Wie dieser Beitrag zeigen wird, hat Seetzen zwölf von vierzehn verschiedenen Sprachen erstmals dokumentiert »; see also her list of all 14 languages documented by Seetzen, of which one was published in 1809, another one in 1812 and all the others in 1816 in [SEETZEN], VATER, « Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass », p. 245–350). She rightly expresses her surprise that none of the relevant publications in the field of Ethiopian Studies (Äthiopistik) deals with Seetzen's word lists, out of which six languages stem from the Ethiopian and Eritrean region. See also: ANGELIKA JAKOBI, « Sudan and South-Sudan » (sub-chapter 5.7. in « The Study of African Languages and Linguistics in North-Eastern Africa »), in EKKEHARD WOLFF (ed.), *A History of African Linguistics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, p. 108–114, here p. 109–10 on Seetzen's word lists, such as those of « Sauaken » and Fur. On the context: DETLEF HABERLAND, « Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und Afrika – die entdeckungs- und wirtschaftsgeschichtliche Dimension seiner Reise », in DETLEF HABERLAND (ed.), *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767-1811), Jeveraner - aufgeklärter Unternehmer - wissenschaftlicher Orientreisender*, Isensee, Oldenburg 2014 (Oldenburger Studien 78), p. 199–255.

[7] See the « Wörterverzeichniss aus der Sprache der Gibbérty in dem Lande Jédschu in Habbésch », in SEETZEN, « Über das Land Jédschu in Habbésch », p. 352–563 (with a number of geographical references provided by the speaker of this language, p. 351–352, which includes the information that « Jédschu », i.e. Yejju, lies south of the independent « Reich Arrargíh », i.e. the Emirate of

ethnonym Argobba, referring to a Muslim group speaking their own language[8] – but different from the one in Seetzen's lists; in fact, this was – as a linguistic analysis shows – apparently a Silt'e dialect that was from another Muslim area). In addition, he included languages from border areas north and south of Ethiopia such as « Tahâsse » (i.e. Tɨgre, from the area of the then Ottoman-controlled Red Sea port of Massawa to the Sudanese border regions, or as the language is called by some Sudanese, to-Hāsā), « Szauakin » (i.e. a Beja dialect from the Ottoman port of Sawakin north of Massawa), and « Galla » (an outdated term often used by highland Ethiopians for different Cushitic-speaking groups, mainly Oromo, which is really the language documented by Seetzen). His lists also covered languages from the Sudan, among others, and « Berber » (a Nile-Nubian language). All of these languages were spoken by inhabitants of Cairo at the time as the city was a meeting place and crossroads for numerous traders, migrants, and abducted slaves from Northeast Africa. We can therefore speak of a surprisingly high degree of « Ethiopian linguistic diversity » in Cairo, which also speaks to the regional interconnections that were present long before colonialism. The language denominations collected by Seetzen thus provide some useful information about the earlier context and affiliations that existed – such as the term « Jeberti » (spelled « Gibberty » by him, based on the Egyptian dialect in which a « J » is realised as a « G »), which as a term normally refers to Muslim traders who spoke Tɨgrɨñña or Amharic.[9] These denominations, such as this one, form a sort of oral geography that will be discussed below.

The publisher of these word lists, the linguist Vater, did not change the spelling or add much to them, except adding some short notes on possibly related words in other languages of the region that appeared in other word lists. He did, however, leave out some of the vocabulary, especially if related to sexual organs.[10] As part of his editorial work, he consulted the word lists brought to Europe by the early nineteenth century British diplomatic envoy to Ethiopia Henry Salt,[11] and he also received some assistance from Carsten Niebuhr, the scholar who had explored Arabic countries and the Red Sea during the Royal Danish Expedition to Arabia of

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Hargé, whose sultan issues his own coins, and that the travel to the country of Iffât, i.e. Yɨfat, takes ten days, and then further to Hargé twenty more days – on this reference see also footnote 3).

[8]   On the 'real' Argobba see: RAINER VOIGT, « Argobba language », in SIEGBERT UHLIG et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. I, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2003, p. 331.

[9]   See on the Jeberti, the complex and diverse meanings of the term and the groups to which it refers to: ABDULKADER SALEH, « Ğäbärti », in SIEGBERT UHLIG et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. II, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2005, p. 597–598.

[10] As noted by DILLMANN, *Verzeichniss der Abessinischen Handschriften*, p. 76 (« mit regelmässiger Auslassung der Wörter für die Genitalien »).

[11] RICHARD PANKHURST, « Salt, Henry », in SIEGBERT UHLIG et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. IV, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 503–504.

the 1760s.[12] As Vater noted, the elderly Niebuhr marked the words in Seetzen's list of the language of Dârfûr that he believed were of Arabic origin.[13]

Focusing here on Seetzen's list for Tɨgrɨñña not only offers insight into this language, but also it will help understand the context for the other languages he documented. Seetzen's Tɨgrɨñña is recognisable as a very local, vernacular language marked by oral simplifications that apparently stemmed from eastern-central Tigray. As the following analysis of the word list shows, moreover, it was also influenced by Muslim terminology. Rather than offering a purely linguistic perspective, this article interprets Seetzen's work as a testament to Cairo's international and northeast African interconnections by using Tɨgrɨñña as an example. Seetzen's lists provide key insight into the linguistic diversity in Cairo of the time, revealing the otherwise totally unknown presence of African travellers and migrants in this region. Similarly, this example also illustrates the 'internationality' of the Horn of Africa, i.e. the far-reaching connections of inner-Ethiopian peoples with their neighbours along ancient routes. That said, the widespread assumption that Seetzen had collected all his material from slaves proves to be faulty, especially given that an initial analysis of this material suggests a broader context of internationality, which included northeast African traders, students and soldiers that Seetzen encountered in Cairo[14].

II. *Hearing and Writing: What Seetzen Heard and Did Not Hear*

The vocabulary that Seetzen wrote down corresponds to oral and familiar language use as well as the typical slurring of an uneducated Tɨgrɨñña speaker with his own particular individual realisation of sounds. This speech is characterised by a number of simplifications and consonant inversions that came from a local, oral practice. For the most part, the list has short, familiar forms of words, such as the

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[12] Cf. CARSTEN NIEBUHR, *Beschreibung von Arabien. Aus eigenen Beobachtungen und im Lande selbst gesammelten Nachrichten*, Möller–Breitkopf, Copenhagen – Leipzig 1772; CARSTEN NIEBUHR, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und anderen umliegenden Ländern*, 2 vols., Möller, Copenhagen 1774–1778; see on his contribution to the knowledge of the northern Ethiopian regions: WOLBERT SMIDT, « Niebuhr, Carsten », in SIEGBERT UHLIG et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. III, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2007, p. 1177.

[13] See VATER, *Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass*, p. X.

[14] It is quite surprising to see the degree of re-writing of research history, against the explicit wording of Seetzen's own reports; a mid-19th century writer claimed, that Seetzen had used « the slaves » brought to Cairo to document their languages, s. Kruse in FRIEDRICH KRUSE (ed.), *Reisen durch Syrien, Palaestina, Phoenicien, die Transjordan-Laender, Arabia Petraea und Unter-Aegypten*, von ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN, vol. IV: *Commentare zu Ulrich Jasper Seetzen's Reisen*, Berlin 1859, p. 495 (« Seetzen hatte die nach Kairo gebrachten Sclaven dazu benutzt, um Erkundigungen über ihre Sprachen einzuziehen »). See on this, among others, footnote 44 below.

words for « God », « Christian » and « Church ».[15] The numeral « Schobáty », for example, suggests that the informant spoke the Central Tigrayan dialect (in a somewhat archaic style), which is also supported by some other word forms. This also fits with the use of the term « Tiggrý », i.e. Tigray, which at that time was the provincial denomination signifying today's Central Tigray only.[16] Similarly, the reference to the city or town « Háuasá » apparently refers to the town of Ḥawzén, then the seat of the princes of Tigray (the so-called *tigré mekonnen*) in Central Tigray (the area called Tigray in older practice, i.e. 'Tigray proper', to be distinguished from the neighbouring autonomous territories such as ʿAgame or Ɨnderta in the east that did not fully become part of a unified princedom of Tigray until later, following complex political processes). This very historical settlement is, in simplified oral practice, also occasionally abbreviated as Ḥawza, as I was able to observe during recent fieldwork, i.e. not « Ḥawaza », as Seetzen's spelling suggests. Likely simply a misunderstanding, Seetzen's spelling with « -ua- » may possibly even be influenced by a toponymic confusion: The river Hawash that often appeared on maps of the time was quite prominent in the neighbouring Afar region. But Seetzen may not have heard the toponym Ḥawza accurately. He may have had issues realising a shwa, i.e. the place name may have been pronounced as Ḥawɨza, and then Seetzen may have been further influenced by the spelling of the river on the maps. Even in today's informal parlance, one may refer to someone from Ḥawzén as « weddi Ḥawza » ('son of Ḥawzén') as a nickname – instead of the more correct « weddi Ḥawzén ».[17] Simplifications of names are widespread in local parlance, although the correct form of a name or toponym is usually preserved in writing or in a more formal setting. This illustrates the very oral, informal setting within which Seetzen found himself as he was trying to document the language – seemingly with someone well acquainted with a very informal way of speaking, but not well versed in high-level formalised language.

The word list allows us to extract even more information about Seetzen's informant. The terms for religious holidays, for paradise (Djénne) and for heathen (Kuffár) point towards a Muslim context, while the Christian terms were typical for the Tigrayan highlands that were dominated by an orthodox Christian

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[15] I am particularly grateful to my field research assistants Mel'aku Kidane from Ɨnderta in Eastern Tigray and Mearg Abay from the Aksum area in Central Tigray for information on rural oral variants and customs.

[16] On this local geographical tradition, based on extensive field research, see: WOLBERT SMIDT, « The Tigrinnya-speakers across the Borders: Discourses of Unity & Separation in Ethnohistorical Context », in MARKUS VIRGIL HÖHNE, DEREJE FEYISSA (eds.), *Borders and Borderlands as Resources in the Horn of Africa*, CURREY, WOODBRIDGE et al. 2010, p. 61–83; see also WOLBERT SMIDT, « Təgray [province] », in SIEGBERT UHLIG et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. IV, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 888–895.

[17] Kind communication by Mel'aku Kidane, Mekelle, during ethnohistorical field research, October 2023.

population. This would fit well with the profile of a Muslim trader from central Tigray, where there was a prominent local Muslim minority. He might also have been a servant to traders, or perhaps someone who had come to Egypt at a younger age whose language had been influenced by Arabic. At one point the list documents a short but typical Tïgriñña sentence that Seetzen did not identify as a phrase. Seetzen translated this phrase that in fact means « He is a devil » simply as « devil », which may speak to the fact that there were limitations present in the communications between Seetzen and his informant. For example, the Tïgriñña word allegedly corresponding to « Imam » in Seetzen's list is Askáry, but this is in fact a mistake – it means 'soldier' and is not even Tïgriñña, but Arabic (in Tïgriñña it would be ḥashker, which Seetzen may have heard and then misinterpreted given the Arabic context). I suspect at this point that this was the result of a simple organisational error in the sequence of his notes – an Imam would be referred to simply as ïmam, and then the word Askáry would probably have followed in the next line, which had been inadvertently conflated. These kinds of errors may indicate that his notes were not yet in good order at the time they were published.

And what did Seetzen hear and not hear? He was clearly a phonetically untrained observer who struggled to find proper systems of transcription (on this see below).[18] But some elements help us to understand what he was actually able to hear or not to hear, or at least not properly hear. A phenomenon typical for German orthography is double consonants, which do not mark geminated consonants (as in established transcriptions of Semitic languages) but indicate that the preceding vowel is short. Therefore, in words such as Hammísty, Schémmunty, Szellésty etc. the double consonants simply mean that Seetzen had heard a short vowel before that consonant. This again shows that Seetzen probably had no ear for consonant gemination (elongated consonants). He did not explicitly mark this in any of the words, suggesting that he had not identified geminations as important. Instead, he put a number of accents on several vowels that seem to indicate some difference of realisation with these vowels. It remains unclear, however, why in some cases he writes í and in others i simply, or what the different accents on the á / â etc. really mean.[19] What we can say, however, is that it seems

[18]   Note on the simplified transcription of Tïgriñña used in this article: For the sake of readability for readers interested in the Ethio-Semitic language Tïgriñña but not necessarily familiar with the rather heavily diacritica-loaded philological transcription used by the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica (EAE)*, I have chosen a transcription system which also, similar to the EAE, uses one separate sign or combination of letters for every separate phoneme, but fewer diacritica. Ejectives are usually marked by apostrophes following the respective consonant (t'), except the q (such as in Qurʿan), the pharyngeals are transcribed as ʿ (ʿayn) and ḥ. The seven Tïgriñña vowels in the vowel order of the Geʿez letter table are e, u, i, a, é, ï (shwa) and o. Other consonants are those known from English or other European languages (such as sh, ñ).

[19]   See in detail the discussion of Seetzen's use of accents and his attempts to correctly transcribe Jakobi, « Seetzen der Sprachensammler », which should not be repeated here; see especially her

that the â is supposed to express some 'long ā', which again betrays an untrained ear in some cases: it seems, for example, that he did not hear the ʿayn in *arbʿa* (which he noted as Arbâ), but instead had some impression of a somehow elongated vowel. He generally does not seem to have properly heard the glottal stop or the ʿayn – but in some cases he had certainly heard something and tried to capture it by using accents (such as Maláiká for *melʾak / malāʾika* with a glottal stop, or Korán for *Qurʿan* or Schobáty for *shobʿate* with an ʿayn). The 'á' seems to indicate that Seetzen had sometimes heard some particular sound such as an ʿayn, which he then indicated with an accent and sometimes with a doubling of vowels (e.g. Arbáatíh for *arbaʿite*).

III. *Identification of Sample Vocabulary*

The following section presents a short extract of the Tɨgrɨñña word list as documented by Seetzen, accompanied by an interpretation and translation of this somehow inconsistently assembled vocabulary and toponyms. The spelling chosen by Seetzen is printed in bold, followed by an approximate reconstruction of what he seems to have heard in square brackets. The reconstructed word in actual Tɨgrɨñña follows in italics, with explanations where needed. As this is not primarily a linguistic article, linguistic terminology has largely been avoided; however, the comparison of the different forms noted by Seetzen and a reconstruction of their phonetic value is useful as it helps to identify the dialectal area of Seetzen's informant. In particular, this analysis provides a wealth of information about the concrete situation of « orality » in which Seetzen found himself, which is why the transcription chosen by Seetzen has been compared to the actual oral practice in (rural) Tɨgrɨñña.

In terms of methodology, the reconstruction that follows in detail below indicates that Seetzen's Tɨgrɨñña was a purely oral language, spoken by probably only one informant without any formal education in writing. At the time, this kind of education did exist in Ethiopia in the form of Geʾez schools: Tɨgrɨñña words with a Geʾez background are presented here in a simplified oral form, which does not show any knowledge of Geʾez etymology. This kind of knowledge would (even today) influence the pronunciation of the words by an educated Tɨgrɨñña-speaker, which would differ from rural speakers living in a purely oral sphere. This forms the basis for the comparison to local oral forms of Tɨgrɨñña gleaned from long years of field research in central and eastern Tigray, which now helps to properly

references regarding the system of transcription influenced by Niebuhr in footnotes 93–95; Jakobi notes that Seetzen was « untrained to correctly hear the languages and phonetic systems unknown to him ».

identify Seetzen's Tïgriñña vocabulary. His entire word list has been vetted not only by me, but also by field assistants from 2019/20, who themselves are deeply rooted in the rural world. Particularly, I am grateful to Mearg Abay from Central Tigray and Mel'aku Kidane from Eastern Tigray for their input, which was supported by information provided by Cherqos Hailu from ʿAgame, whose intelligence and language sensitivity combined with a lack of modern formal education (due to which he has a closer connection to local traditions) was a huge advantage in this case. In addition, I also cross-checked the oral use of Muslim terminology with Abduselam Ademnur in Mekelle and Addis Abeba. Moreover, it should be noted that despite strong contemporary attempts to achieve an orthographic formalisation of Tïgriñña, there are still some variations strongly influenced by the oral sphere, which I also refer to in the lists below.

Seetzen attempted to find some sort of system of transcription, but his lack of training and his difficulty in phonetically dissecting the words (which were sometimes not well pronounced, but 'mumbled') led to numerous inconsistencies. As we have already seen, Seetzen had based his transcription on the German pronunciation, which makes the reading a bit difficult, as his choices of spelling are a bit surprising in some cases. However, given that an approximate reconstruction of what Seetzen had really heard (even if erroneous) plays a key role in this analysis, an attempt to compare his spellings was therefore attempted for the purposes of this article. In some cases, therefore, these reconstructions assist in the identification of the Tïgriñña term that Seetzen actually meant.

To illustrate this method of deciphering Seetzen's 'tongue', the following observation shall serve to clarify the sound value of some of the letters used by him. For example, depending on its position in the word, the written letter 's' in the German language is pronounced like an <s> or <z> (as in zebra in English); therefore, in Seetzen's transcription, the letter 's' sometimes corresponds to the English <z>. If a word starts with the sound <s>, Seetzen then usually wrote an 'sz' following the model of the German 'sharp S' [ß] in order to avoid a possible confusion with <z>. However, as a linguistically inexperienced researcher, at one point he even seems to have heard the sound <ts> (which is spelled 'z' in German and by Seetzen) when in reality it was just a 'sharp s' (therefore wrongly writing « Zmániá » for *semanya*), which may, however, simply be a mistake in his notes.

Generally, the identification of the vocabulary that Seetzen actually meant to record, which appears sometimes in a familiar, dialectal form, helps us to identify some of the rules that Seetzen tried to establish for his attempt at transcription. As shown above with the example of the ʿayn, he had certainly heard *something*, but had no degree of certainty or frame of reference. As a result, his transcription is quite irregular and inconsistent, using different accents for the same vowel, sometimes even writing the same word differently, due to changed contexts in which he likely heard it differently (e.g. Schobáty [7] for *shobʿate* and variants and

Assírto schebáatíh [17] for *ʿasɨrte shobʿate* and variants). However, in order to read this list, it was generally helpful to use phonetic values based on German spelling rules. This then, in comparison to the factual pronunciation of words, helped us to reconstruct what Seetzen must have heard. In one case, however, he creates his own spelling convention differing from German standards, when he uses the -y to express a short -e at the end of words; this, clearly, is also influenced by a local dialectal variant that realises – even in today's practice in the countryside[20] – the -e as a short -i (such as in Háddy for *ḥadde*).[21] Also, his use of accents is not based on any German spelling standards – clearly a failed attempt, but still useful when we try to reconstruct what he had actually been able to hear (or not hear).

III.1. Identification of place names, ethnonyms and geographical terms

Seetzen's word list is entitled « Sprache von Tiggrý, welche in der Stadt Háuasá gesprochen wird » ('Language of Tiggrý, which is spoken in the town Háuasá'). These two toponyms can be explained as follows.

Tiggrý [Seetzen hears: « tɨgre »]
NB: Seetzen uses the « y » for a short « e » sound (cp. below: Háddy, Kúlty).
= *Tɨgré* [ትግሬ], Amharic for *Tɨgray* [ትግራይ]; the use of the generally known and common Amharic term is not surprising in a linguistic context outside Tigray, where Tigrayans would use the foreign Amharic term in conversations with foreigners, since it was assumed to be more familiar. The use in Ethiopia of the purely Tɨgrɨñña term « Tɨgray » in a non-Tɨgrɨñña linguistic context is a very recent development in the last two decades only.

Háuasá [Seetzen hears: « hawaza » or « hawɨza »]
NB: in German the 's' at the beginning of a word or of a syllable stands for <z>.
= *Ḥawza* [ሓውዛ] (sometimes realised as *Ḥawɨza*) – at first sight, this seems to refer to the ancient settlement Ḥawza nearby Wuqro in the province of Tseraʿ, which is mentioned in older sources and in today's oral tradition of that region[22] as an important old settlement along the ancient eastern

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[20] Besides personal observations during field research in eastern Tigray, this was confirmed by Mel'aku Kidane, who was exposed to many dialects, and identified by him as typical for countryside areas from Ḥawzen to Ɨnderta in eastern Tigray.

[21] Perhaps based on some European languages such as Polish with the particular phonetic value of -y?

[22] Field research carried out in 2019 for the Yeha-Project at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena in cooperation with the German Archaeological Institute. Local informants also refer to Aksumite foundations of the main church of Ḥawza; only two decades later, Théophile Lefebvre, the

Tigrayan trade route, linking the Red Sea via nearby Negash with inner Ethiopia. It can also be a simple informal variant of the place name Ḥawzén [ሓውዜን] in local oral practice (in recent field research, I observed that in very informal, local parlance, someone who comes from Ḥawzen could be called « weddi Ḥawza » 'son of Ḥawza'). The addition of an -a- in Háu-a-sá is probably the result of Seetzen's inability to properly identify vowels with which he is unfamiliar; he may have taken the shwa in Ḥawɨza for a short 'a'. The question is, however, whether the Ḥawza near Wuqro fits into the dialectal area to which the Tɨgrɨñña documented here belongs, which was rather central Tigrayan as opposed to eastern. The only urban centre in central Tigray besides Aksum and ʿAdwa was Ḥawzén near ʿAdwa, and in fact an important one. In the first half of the nineteenth century it repeatedly appeared in Ethiopian sources, confirmed by detailed local oral tradition, as the seat of the princes of Tigray, and therefore an important centre of regional power that could certainly be called a « town » ('Stadt').[23]

The list also contains the following ethnonyms, or denominations of specific socio-cultural and socio-economic groups and geographical terms.

44. Pond ('Teich') Kaléy = qalay (ቃላይ)

45. Mountain ('Berg') Ömba = ɨmba (እምባ)

46. Valley ('Thal') Ustíh = wusht'i (ውሽጢ, with an Amharic accent: wust'i) – meaning 'inside'; while there is no term exactly corresponding to 'valley',

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traveller of the 1830s, refers to this eastern Tigrayan route, which can clearly be identified as largely identical with the historical route known from local tradition, leading through Negash, passing by the rock-hewn church of Wuqro Maryam (which he wrongly calls « Mariam Courou ») and Agulaʿ (« Agoula »), and mentions that he crossed the plains of « Aouza » with well over one thousand inhabitants on his way to the vast plains of Ɨnderta (THÉOPHILE CHARLEMAGNE LEFEBVRE, *Voyage en Abyssinie exécuté pendant les années 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843*, vol. I: *Relation historique*, Bertrand, Paris 1845, p. 278ff.). He also mentions « Aouzienne » (Ḥawzén), where he arrived later during his trip, with around 2000 inhabitants.

23 See GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI, « Ḥawzen », in SIEGBERT UHLIG et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. II, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2005, p. 1054–1055, who refers to 13th century sources according to which the « province of Ḥawzén » encompassed important parts of modern Tigray, from the Tekkeze river in its southwest to Tembén, Tseraʿ and Ɨnderta to the ʿAfar borderlands of Arho in the east, which roughly corresponds to the dialectal area to which Seetzen's word list can be linked. See also the letters by *nɨgus* Nɨgusé, who claimed to be the king of Ethiopia in the late 1850s (in competition with *atsé* Téwodros II who was ruling the other half of Ethiopia), written in his capital Ḥawzén, the traditional seat of the rulers of Tigray: SVEN RUBENSON (ed.), *Tewodros and his Contemporaries, 1855–1868*, Lund – Addis Ababa 1994 (Acta Aethiopica 2), no. 49, p. 88 (letter to Emperor Napoléon III, 1 November 1859, written in Ḥawzén), no. 50, p. 90 (letter to a French representative).

the term gereb could be used according to context (valley with a seasonally dry river).

47. Sea ('Meer') Báhhrih = baḥri (ባሕሪ)

48. River ('Fluss') M´ö nu = may ɨnnehɨyu (ማይ እነሁዩ), orally also realised as may nɨyu (which is probably the form Seetzen had heard) or may nɨyo (variants: may ɨnneho / ɨnni'o - ማይ እነሆ/ እኒኦ) – a simple phrase meaning 'there is water', while 'river' would be ruba or gereb (seasonally dry river), depending on the dialect.

49. Water source ('Quelle') Minky = mɨnch'i (ም ንጪ, a typical Tigrayan term, synonymous for 'ayni, signifying a particularly clean water source)[24], (remark: this is one example where Seetzen uses 'k' to transliterate the ch'e / ጪ, similarly to the word Negk, see below; we can certainly exclude that Minky refers to mɨnqi, which is a rare term expressing opposition, e.g. in mɨnqeñña; it also appears in informal expressions such as in the rhyme 'ch'ɨnqi mɨnqi', where the second word does not carry a specific meaning, but is used as a stylistic element to reinforce the idea – in this case joking about 'worries').

76. East ('Osten') Szahhéy wússit = tseḥay wusid? – to be interpreted either as Amharic tseḥay wust' (ፀሓይ ዉስጥ), 'inmidst sunshine' (then probably a misunderstanding of some explanations by the informant, who was perhaps referring to someone sitting in the sunshine) or rather nab tseḥay mɨwtsaʿ ('to the appearing / outcoming sun'), which is a rural informal way of referring to the East, where « the sun comes out » (in a formally more correct form this would be: nab tseḥay mɨbraq – 'to the [brightly] rising sun').

77. South ('Süden') Szehhéy röffády = tseḥay refadi (ፀሓይ ረፋዲ) – reference to the period around midday starting from late morning[25] or, in a more dialectal realisation, tseḥay refdi.

78. West ('Westen') Szehhéy atût = tseḥay atewot, i.e. tseḥay atɨya, ፀሓይ ኣትያ, mixed with Amharic (atut, ኣቱት) – reference to the period of the day when the sun is setting (with tseḥay set in a female gender, while a male gender is also occasionally chosen).

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[24] Kind explanation by Ar'aya Teklay, 4 April 2022.
[25] Explanation by Ar'aya Teklay (he explains it in the following way: « ፀሓይ ረፋድ ማለት ንግሆ ናብ ቀትሪ ዝኸድ ኣካባቢ ዘሎ እዩ », 'tseḥay refad refers to the period when the sun moves from morning to daytime').

79. North ('Norden') Szehhéy jíllun = tseḥay yellen (ፀሓይ የለን, lit. 'there is no sun') – which refers to the night or other periods without sunshine such as the rainy season (perhaps mixed up with the expression tseḥay yebelun, which is used in another context to refer to a specific place which is shadowy).[26]

80. Egypt ('Ägypten') Misríh = Mɨsri (ምስሪ)

81. Sinnar ('Sennar') Sennâr = Sɨnnar (ስናር)

82. Nomadic Arab ('Nomadischer Araber') Kóllattéy = qollatay (ቆላታይ) – a term which refers to qolla ('lowlands'), with the suffic -tay, i.e. 'inhabitant of the lowlands' (male, singular), which carries the connotation, but not the explicit meaning of a person with a nomadic lifestyle (not an Arab, but usually Muslims or believers in traditional religions often linked by trade with the Muslim world).

83. Negroe ('Neger') Adbáreá = ʿAd Barya (ዓድ ባርያ) – which is a compound of ʿad ('descent group') and barya ('slave' or 'black slave', or more generally meaning a black person, but with a pejorative undertone); Seetzen has – it seems – not fully understood the explanations given to him, but his translation is still very close to the term, including the pejorative, racist undertone: the term barya as used in Ethiopian highlanders' parlance corresponds quite exactly to the term 'negroe', which is to be seen in the context of former European slave trade and continued slavery in America, which includes heavy racist connotations – similar to the connotations linked with the Ethiopian term 'barya', as Ethiopia was then still actively involved in the international Arab slave trade (including with Egypt – with many slaves of Northeastern African origin found in Cairo); the term ʿAd Barya therefore signifies a descent group with a « barya » background, i.e. either black people perceived as « potential slaves » or as slaves, or more generally a group of people with black complexion. It has to be noted, that while the term ʿad is usually used to designate actually existing descent or ethnic groups, in this case this term is in reality a gross xenonym (under the appearance of a regular ethnonym), i.e. a foreign designation of a group, whose ethnic identity is not respected by those using this term.[27]

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[26] Explanation by Ar'aya Teklay (he gives one example for the use of this term: « እዚ ገዛ ፀሓይ የብሉን ፀላል እዩ », 'this house [is situated in an area] without sun, there is shadow').

[27] See HAGAR SALAMON, « Barya », in SIEGBERT UHLIG et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. I, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2003, p. 489–490; see also WOLBERT SMIDT, « Slavery in the language – Barya, Barot, Tsellim in Tigrinnya (northern Ethiopia / Eritrea) and its connotations », *International Conference « Slavery in Africa, Past, Legacies and Present »*, Catholic University of Eastern

84. White person ('Weisser') Negk = nech' (ነጭ), Amharic for 'white', also used for 'white person' – the use of Amharic can be explained by the fact that it was more common to see white people within the context of the Amharic-speaking court and international contacts, who then got the label « white » in Amharic, while in Tɨgrɨñña the colour white was only rarely associated with denominations of Europeans, due to a more traditional system of denominations of skin colours which did almost not use the term « white » for skin colour in the past (Europeans – like Ethiopian highlanders – were rather designated as qeyyɨḥ in Tɨgrɨñña, 'red').

85. A blackish-brown [person] ('Ein Schwärzlichbrauner') T´äim = t'eyɨm (ጸይም) – which is a commonly used adjective to designate a person of darker, but not black complexion, which corresponds also to contemporary oral praxis, where – given quite a variety of skin colours in Ethiopia – references to specific persons are often linked with terms referring to skin colour (among other terms referring to the appearance or behavior of a person), in order to quickly identify someone during a conversation.

96. A travelling merchant ('Ein reisender Kaufmann') Nagádey = negaday (ነጋዳይ), also negadi (ነጋዲ).

There are also some interesting designations of occupations and ranks that are not discussed in this article. They provide an insight into the social sphere with which Seetzen's interlocutor was familiar, but are of secondary importance for the identification of the geographical context. However, it can be briefly stated here that they correspond to the practice of the typical free peasantry of Tigray and the largely warlike aristocratic class of the time.[28]

472. Town ('Stadt') Áddy = ʿaddi (ዓዲ) – a term which is not fully identical with the European terms for town or settlement; it refers to a settled area with its land and its people together, as peasants and cattle herders are legally not separable from their land in the sphere of Tɨgrɨñña-speakers; it can refer to a town as to a village or even a larger area, and always expresses a strong sense of belonging .

473. Big town/city ('Grosse Stadt') Awíh áddy = ʿawiy ʿaddi (ዓዊ ዓዲ, a purely oral form, from ʿabiy ʿaddi, ዓቢይ ዓዲ, 'big settlement').

28   [SEETZEN], VATER, « Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass », p. 342–365.

474. Small settlement ('Flecken') Nejíschtä áddy = nɨˈɨshte ʿaddi (ንእሽተ ዓዲ, 'small settlement')

475. Village ('Dorf') Haggréssel [the 'l' is certainly a typo] = hagereseb (ሃገረሱብ) – which means 'countryside' in local parlance: it is quite usual that an area with several rural settlements is called hagereseb, which explains the only slightly wrong translation provided by Seetzen.

III.2. The 30 numerals of Seetzen's word list interpreted and contextualised

One – **Háddy** [Seetzen hears: « hadde »] = *ḥadde* [ሓደ]. Still today, in a rural setting, this word can be realised as *ḥaddi* – like other numerals such as « *kɨlɨtti* »; such a rural accent can be found all over eastern Tigray, starting from the Ḥawzén area to Irob, Saḥarti, Selewa (only in the ʿAdwa area, central Tigray, it is consistently *ḥadde*).	Sixteen – **Assírto schiddísty** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrto shɨdiste »] = *ʿasserte shiddɨshte* [ዓሰርተ ሽድሽተ]; also realised as *ʿasserto shiddɨshti* (see the remarks on the realisation of vowels in a rural setting above).
Two – **Kúlty** [Seetzen hears: « Kulte », « kɨlte »] = *kɨlɨtte, kɨlɨtti* (on the ending vowel -i see above), also realised as *kɨlte* [ክልተ], or in individual deviating pronunciation *kulte* (the shwa realised as a short *u*), also in today's rural Tɨgrɨñña quite typical of an elder or someone who speaks in a somewhat mumbling manner; cp. the word « Asirto kúlty » (see below), i.e. pronounced *ʿasɨrto kulte* (whereby the final -*e* in the word *ʿasserte* tends towards an -*o* through assimilation by the *u* in « Kúlty », which may explain the form « Assírto » for numbers 11ff).	Seventeen – **Assírto schebáatíh** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrto sheba'ati » or « asɨrto shebɨ'ati »] = *ʿasserte sheb ʿate* [ዓሰርተ ሸበዓተ], also realised as *ʿasserto shob ʿate* [ዓሰርተ ሾበዓተ] (slightly archaic forms), but today usually as *ʿasserte show ʿatte* [ዓሰርተ ሾውዓተ]. The inconsistency in Seetzen's notes (for « seven » he refers to *shob ʿate*, while in « seventeen » it is *sheb ʿate*) reflects different possibilities of oral realisation; for example when a speaker repeats the word slowly to make it understood, it would be *ʿasserte sheb ʿate*.

Three – **Szellésty** [Seetzen hears: « ßeleste »] = *seleste* [ሰለስተ], also realised as *selesti* in a rural setting.	Eighteen – **Assírto schemmúnty** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrto shemunte »] = *ʿasserte shemmonte* [ዓስርተ ሸሞንተ].
Four – **Arbáatíh** [Seetzen hears: « arbaʾatɨ⇥»] = *arbaʿte* [ኣርባዕተ], in oral realisation also *arbɨʿati / arbɨʿate* [ኣርቡዓተ].	Nineteen – **Assírto tischáatý** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrto tishaʾate »] = *ʿasserte tɨshʿatte* [ዓስርተ ትሽዓተ].
Five – **Hammísty** [Seetzen hears: « hamɨste »] = *ḥammushte* [ሐሙሽተ], also realised as *ḥammushti* in a rural setting.	Twenty – **Ősra** [Seetzen hears: ʿɨsra] = *ʿɨsra* [ዕስራ].
Six – **Schiddísty** [Seetzen hears: « shɨdɨste »] = *shiddɨshte* [ሽድሽተ], also realised as *shiddɨshti* in a rural setting.	Twenty-one – **Ősrán haddíh** [Seetzen hears: « ʿɨsran ḥadde »] = *ʿɨsran ḥadden* [ዕስራን ሓደን].
Seven – **Schobáty** [Seetzen hears: « shobʾate »] = *shobʿatte* [ሾብዓተ]; this form exists as a variant from Ḥamasén to Ɨnderta, but most frequently in central Tigray up to Ḥamasén (central Eritrea); variant of *shewʿatte* [ሸውዓተ] / *showʿatte* [ሾውዓተ] (orally shortened also as *shoʿatte* [ሾዓተ]), also realised as *shobʿatti* in a rural setting.	Thirty – **Szálâssa** [Seetzen hears: « ßalāsa »] = *selasa* [ሰላሳ]. This simple form is contrasted by the rather complex transcription used by Seetzen; comparison shows that he used the â for a perceived long vowel (ā) imitating the Arabic vowel model, which in fact does not fit to Tɨgrɨñña (á = e, â = a, which is the ā in the Arabic vowel model).
Eight – **Schémmuntý** [Seetzen hears: « shemunte »] = *shemmonte* [ሸሞንተ], also realised as *shemmonti* in a rural setting.	Forty – **Arbâ** [Seetzen hears: « arbʾā »] = *arbɨʿa* [ኣርቡዓ].
Nine – **Tischáatíh** [Seetzen hears: « tishaʾati »] = *tɨshʿatte* [ትሽዓተ], which is the dialectal form of central Tigray up to central Eritrea (different from	Fifty – **Hámsza** [Seetzen hears: « hamßa »] = *ḥamsa* [ሓምሳ].

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eastern Tigrayan *tɨshʿante* [ትሽዓንተ], where the geminated *-tt-* is realised as *-nt-*), also realised as *tɨshʿatti* in a rural setting.	
Ten – **Assírty** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrte »] = ʿasserte [ዓስርተ], also realised as ʿasɨrte [ዓስርተ] or ʿasɨrti in a rural setting.	Sixty – **Szílsza** [Seetzen hears: « ßilßa »] = sɨlsa [ስልሳ], Amharic numeral also widely used in Tigray, different from the proper Tɨgrɨñña sisa [ሲሳ] or susa [ሱሳ].
Eleven – **Assírto háddy** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrto hadde »] = ʿasserte ḥadde [ዓስርተ ሓደ]. In eastern Tigray, starting from the Ḥawzén area to the east, this may also be realised as ʿasserto ḥaddi (see the remarks above on the realisation of vowels in those rural areas and on 'mumbling' in the following entry).	Seventy – **Szébba** [Seetzen hears: « ßeb'a »] = sebʿa [ሰብዓ].
Twelve – **Assírto kúlty** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrto kulte »] = ʿasserte kɨlte, ʿasserte kɨlɨtte [ዓስርተ ክልተ], rarely also pronounced ʿasɨrto kulte with a short *u* as an individual « mumbled » realisation of the shwa (not uncommon even today in rural areas; see above: Two – Kúlty).	Eighty – **Zmǽniá** [Seetzen hears: « ßemānya »] = semanya [ሰማንያ]. There is probably a mistake in the notes, maybe due to lack of time; according to Seetzen's system he would normally have transcribed the word as « Szemǽniá ».
Thirteen – **Assírto szellésty** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrto ßeleste »] = ʿasserte seleste [ዓስርተ ሰለስተ]. Also here, Seetzen transcribes « Assírto », while this variant is extremely rare the oral sphere (he probably just took the oral realisation he had noted for twelve as a standard).	Ninety – **Tíschaatíh** [Seetzen should have heard: « tes'a », but inserts the word he had noted already for nine, probably due to a confusion in his notes or rather a confusion by the speaker – when not very experienced, even today such a unconscious mistake may happen in daily conversations, especially if in hurry; Seetzen hears: « tisha'ati »].

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	= *tesᶜa* [ተስዓ]. This may also be an indication that this word list was only a quick draft that still needed to be reworked.
Fourteen – **Assírto arbáatíh** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrto arba'atɨ»] = ᶜasserte arbaᶜite [ዓስርተ አርባዕተ].	Hundred – **Mijetíh** [« mi'iti », maybe heard as « miyeti »] = *mi'ɨti* [ሚእቲ], also *mi'iti* [ሚኢቲ].
Fifteen – **Assírto hammastíh** [Seetzen hears: « asɨrto hamastɨ»] = ᶜasserte ḥammushte [ዓስርተ ሓሙኅሽተ]. Again the difference to Seetzen's transcription for five, « Hammísty », is to be noted. This could mean that his informant had pronounced the word with a shwa (ḥammɨshte); Seetzen repeatedly has difficulties identifying the right vowel representing the shwa (ɨ).	Thousand – **Schahhéh** [Seetzen hears: « shehe »] = *shɨḥ* [ሽሕ], sometimes also pronounced *sheḥ* [ሽሕ], which was probably the form Seetzen had heard and misinterpreted due his difficulty in identifying and transcribing the strong, pharyngeal *ḥ* at the end, which he 'heard' as an extended h (-hhéh). It is probable that he had also heard the word for '1001 », which is – in the eastern Tgn. dialect – *shɨḥey-ḥaddey* (thousand and one'), of which Seetzen then took the first element, reducing it wrongly; he seems to have attempted to write « *shɨḥey* », which by fact means 'thousand and ...'.

III.3. Sample: The first Non-Numeral Terms in Seetzen's Word List

1. God – **Esgíh** [Seetzen hears: « ezgi »]
   = ɨzgi [እዝጊ], a typical oral, inverted form, from ɨgzi [እግዚ], meaning 'lord' in the religious sense, short form of Ge'ez ɨgzi'abihér [እግዚአብሄር], 'God'.

2. Angel – **Maláiká** [Seetzen hears: « mala'ika »]
   = shortened from « nay ɨgzi mela'ika », a rather rare oral form for « nay igzi mel'akti » ('the angels of God'), referring to the term for 'angel' *mel'ak* [መልአክ], from Ge'ez. There are also names using this word as an element, such as Mel'aku, 'his [God's] angel'; the connection of this item with the Arabic word for angel, *malāk* [ملاك], plural form *al-malā'ika* [الملائكة], is evident – this shows that Seetzen's informant has linked the rare oral form in Tɨgrɨñña with the current Arabic term, or Seetzen may have

misunderstood an explanation by his informant (NB: a popular female name in Northafrica is Malika, 'Queen' [ملكة], derived from another word, *malik* ['king'], which has, however, probably not influenced this note).

3. Devil – **Scheïtán ejú** [Seetzen hears: « sheytan ɨyu »]
   = *sheyt'an ɨyu* [ሸይጣን እዩ], which means 'he/this is (a) devil'. It seems that Seetzen's informant said when asked for the word for devil: 'this is *sheyt'an*' – which then simply means: 'the word you are looking for is *sheyt'an'*. This is, therefore, a further element illustrating the oral communication between Seetzen and his informant.

4. Paradise – **Djénne** [Seetzen hears: « dyenne »]
   = in the ecclesiastical context in Central Tigray usually *jennet* [ጀነት], orally also realised as *dyenne, dyennet*, which corresponds to the more formal Tɨgriñña term *gennet* [ገነት] from Ge'ez ('heaven' in the religious sense); the actual pronunciation documented here is probably influenced by Arabic *janna* [جَنَّة].

5. Hell – **Dgehénnem** [Seetzen hears: « dɨgehenem »]
   = Tigrinized term *'da gahɨnnem* ['ዳ ጋህነም] which is an oral short form of *ɨnda gahɨnem* [እንዳ ጋህነም] (literally 'place of hell', but meaning 'hell'), from an association with the Amharic term *gahɨnem* [ጋህነም], 'hell' (in standard Tɨgriñña and Amharic also *gehannem* - ገሃነም). This may show the influence of Amharic-speaking priests due to the central role of Amharophone Gonder for church education; the use of an Amharic term from the ecclesiastical context is, however, not necessarily indicative of an Amharic-influenced dialect.

6. Mohammedan – **Islámmey** [Seetzen hears: « ɨslamay »]
   = *ɨslamay* [እስላማይ], 'Muslim', which as a term emphasizes the phonetic connection to the word *ɨslam* [እስላም], in contrast to the more familiar and equally common *Aslamay* [አስላማይ], 'Muslim', a form only used by Christians and which, according to context, has or can have a pejorative / disparaging connotation. However, the phonetically more exact connection to the word *ɨslam* shows respect for the religion (in its official designation).

7. Christian – **Kistánney** [Seetzen hears: « kɨstanay »]
   = *Kɨstanay* [ክስታናይ] 'Christian', a common oral variant of the formal term *Krɨstyanay* [ክርስትያናይ] 'Christian'.

8. Heathen – **Kuffár** [Seetzen hears: « kufar »]

= in local parlance in the term *kufar* refers to a bad moment, bad luck.[29] In addition, in Tɨgrɨñña, 'heathen' is occasionally referred to as *kafɨr* [ካፍር], influenced by Arabic (especially in border areas with Sudan and along trade routes to the Red Sea, as far as Massawa; this is related to the word *kafɨr* / *kafer* [ካፈር] used in purely rural areas for a larger woven basket).[30]

9. Koran – **Korán** [Seetzen hears: « kor'an »]
   = *qur'an* [ቁርኣን]; the term used in Tɨgrɨnnya is almost identical with the Arabic one.

10. Beiram – **Phóttir** [Seetzen hears: « fötir »]
    Seetzen must have heard an explanation by his informant that he did not fully understand on the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast, one of the two most important Muslim feasts, which is called *Ramazan Bayram* in Ottoman and *ʿĪd al-fiṭr* in Arabic, which takes place at the end of Ramadan. (NB: There may also have been some confusion with Tɨgrɨñña *fut'ur* [ፉጡር] / *fɨt'ur* [ፍጡር], 'creature', in Seetzen's seemingly difficult conversation with his Tigrayan informant; the spelling of the shwa as 'ö' is not surprising, since the pronunciation can approximate a short German 'ö', at least to the ear of a speaker of German.

11. Church – **Betúskién** [Seetzen hears: « betɨskiyén »[31]]
    = *béte-kɨsyan* [ቤተክስያን], with an inversion *béte-skiyan* (in individual parlance), an oral familial short form of *béte-kɨstyan* [ቤተክስትያን], *béte-kɨstan* [ቤተክስታን], *béte-kɨstan* [ቤተኽስታን], and the more formal *béte krɨstyan* [ቤተ ክርስትያን] ('church'). The familial forms are especially common in a rural context. NB: For comparison see the synonymous *béte ɨgzi* [ቤተ እግዚ] or short, with an inversion, *béte-zgi* [ቤተዝጊ] 'place of worship' (spelled without *-n*; but in the case of an uneducated speaker a blending is possible as a hypercorrection, thus creating a wrong form such as *bete-zgé-n*, in adaptation to the pattern of *bete-kɨstan*; therefore it cannot be excluded that Seetzen had heard both forms and then took them for the same word).

12. Kurban Beiram (Ottoman: Qurban Bayram, 'Feast of Sacrifice', in Arabic *Īdu l-Aḍḥā*, the highest Muslim feast in the last month of the Muslim calendar, *Dhū al-Hijjah*) – **Arraphá** [Seetzen hears: « arafa »]
    = *ʿarefa* [ዓረፋ], term used by Tɨgrɨñña-speaking Muslims, meaning the fasting day of Arafah [يوم عرفة] (of Mount Arafat) on the 9th day of the month Dhul al-Hijjah, just before the feast of Qurban Bayram, which starts on the 10th

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29 Informant: Mel'aku Kidane, Mekelle.
30 Informant: Cherqos Haylu, Siḥeta.
31 Possibly also « *betɨzkiyén* ».

day.[32] This shows that there is some problem of order in Seetzen's list, as « Arraphá » is not a Tɨgrɨñña translation of « Kurban Beiram », but both terms are Ottoman and seem to form a unit – maybe there was a linguistic unclarity on the side of Seetzen or his notes were simply not yet complete.[33]

13. Mosque – **Mesgítt** [Seetzen hears: « mesgit »]
= *mesgid* [መስጊድ], the usual term used for mosques also in today's Tɨgrɨñña (from Arabic *masjid* [مسجد]).

14. Prayer – **Sziggét** [Seetzen hears: « siget »]
= *sɨged* [ስገድ], which is the imperative form (masculine, singular) for prostrating in veneration of Allah (a word typical for Muslims, not for Christians), also used more generally in the meaning of 'praying'. Prayer of Christians is called *sɨgdet* [ስግደት], prayer of Muslims is *selat* [ሰላት].[34]

15. Imam – **Askáry** [Seetzen hears: « askari »]
This is clearly a merger of two separate lines in the list (which probably means that Seetzen's list was not yet complete or was misread by the publisher), as these are two different Arabic words. Each of them should have had a separate Tɨgrɨñña translation: the Muslim religious title is *imam* [ኢማም] also in Tɨgrɨñña; the translation for the Ottoman-Arabic term *askari* [عسكري] ('soldier') into Tɨgrɨñña is *ḥashker* [ሓሽከር].

16. Circumcision – **Korósso métterú** [Seetzen hears: « koroso meteru »] = *quretso* [ቁረጾ] ('something to be cut', or imperative 'cut!') *mɨtero* [ምተሮ] ('to prepare/prepare/cut small').[35] However, circumcision actually means *mɨgraz* [ምግራዝ], *gɨrzat* [ግርዛት], *girezo* [ግረዞ], and is not called *quretso mɨtero*; but Seetzen's misunderstanding is easy to understand – apparently his informant had added an explanation which Seetzen then thought was the actual term and then failed to note the correct term.

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[32] Probably not referring to the Arife day, which generally signifies any day before an important feast, more specifically the day before a feast shortly after the Feast of Sacrifice (Qurban Bayram).

[33] Note from the oral sphere of Tɨgrɨñña-speakers, which just illustrates how local people tend to re-interpret this word: In uneducated oral speech, the word *'arefa* could be associated with the Christian concept *me'arɨf tsadqan(at)* in Tɨgrɨñña, the 'seat/resting place of the faithful on the way near a church'; there is also the form *me'arɨfi*, with a purely oral variant *me'arɨfa*, which could also contribute to mixing these terms.

[34] In oral speech, this linguistic differentiation is crucial to identify a Muslim or a Christian context.

[35] In modern Tɨgrɨñña with new secondary meaning 'measure', derived from the Italian teaching word metro ('*metre*'), which evidently cannot be used here as an explanation.

IV. *Cairo's Non-European Internationality and Linguistic Diversity: Elements of an Oral Geography*

Certainly, Seetzen's lists are linguistically interesting in that they provide some small insights into dialects and especially into the oral practice of northeastern African languages. But, perhaps more importantly, the word lists in their entirety offer another kind of key insight into the world in which Seetzen travelled: They give us an impression of the surprisingly elevated diversity of northeastern African languages present in Cairo at that time. As mentioned above, the languages from the wider Ethiopian region documented by Seetzen were Tɨgriñña (as discussed in this article), Amharic, Silt'é, Tigré, Oromo, Beja and Berber, among others, called by him « Tiggrý », « Gibberty », « Argubba », « Tahâsse » etc. The language denominations he used are in and of themselves interesting and merit further scholarly attention. The question of which actual languages they in fact represented has already been the subject of research, even if not in sufficient depth, and the work done so far has already proved to be useful. Seetzen's « Argubba », for example, was identified by Leslau as a variant of Sɨlt'e Wolane.[36] Wolane is an Eastern Gurage language, along with Sɨlt'e and Ɨnneqor (called the « Sɨlt'e group » by some linguists such as Gutt and considered a group of three dialects). The great majority of the Wolane are Muslims.[37]

The « Tahasse » of Seetzen (published in Vater's book from 1816)[38] had been identified as Tigre at some point after studies on the Tigre of the coast had begun. The term refers to the language's denomination tū-Hāsā,[39] which existed in the Sudanese context. First research on Tɨgre had been launched by Werner Munzinger around 1864,[40] but it was only much later that research on Tɨgre continued. Praetorius, for instance, only briefly referred to this language.[41] The

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[36] Wolf Leslau, « Examen du supposé Argobba de Seetzen et de Lefebvre », *Word*, 5/1 (1949), p. 46–54.

[37] Ronny Meyer, « Wälane language », in Siegbert Uhlig et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. IV, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 1079–1080.

[38] [Seetzen], Vater, « Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass », p. 280.

[39] They are living mainly in today's western Eritrea and also, historically, in the Sudanese-Eritrean borderlands. In the Sudan they were called Hāsā, which explains also the designation to-Hāsā, a language name which was formed based on the Eastern Sudanese Beja-model – the Beja language of the Bisharin in today's Eritrean-Sudanese borderlands is still called tū-Bidhaawye (*Tū-Beḏāwie,* in simplified spelling also To-Bedawie); see Wolbert Smidt, « Təgre ethnography », in Siegbert Uhlig et al. (eds.): *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. IV, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 897–899; compare with Herman Almkvist, *Die Bischari-Sprache Tū-Beḏāwie in Nordost-Afrika,* Upsala 1881.

[40] Werner Munzinger, « Vocabulaire de la langue Tigre », in August Dillmann, *Lexicon linguae Aethiopicae. Cum indice Latino*, Weigel, Leipzig 1865, p. 1–64.

[41] Franz Praetorius, « Himjarische Beiträge », *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 26 (1872), p. 747.

first important researcher on Tɨgre, Enno Littmann mentioned, but did not make use of Seetzen's glossary.[42]

Seetzen's publisher Vater describes how Seetzen had been able to access these languages, quoting Seetzen's remark on Cairo as an international centre, « where travellers arrive from the entire northern Africa, from the Nile to the Atlantic Ocean, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Senegal, Gülby [= Niger], and southwards from Habesch [al-Ḥabash = arab. Ethiopia] up to Singebar [= Zanzibar], some arriving on their pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, others staying there due to their studies and to trade ».[43] This description shows that, as already mentioned above, the widespread assumption in the existing literature that Seetzen had collected vocabulary mainly from slaves does not reflect the cosmopolitan situation in which Seetzen found himself in Cairo, which was undoubtedly a metropolitan centre.[44] Seetzen's reference to « studies » is of particular interest here: The ancient university al-Azhar in Cairo, one of the most ancient universities of the world, attracted Muslim students from far and wide, including from the entire Horn of Africa. The presence of « Ḥabashi » at al-Azhar (Arabic for Ethiopians, mainly as a reference to the Ethiopian highlands and the directly adjacent regions), for example, has been well documented in Cairo over many centuries.[45] Correspondingly, we can probably assume that Seetzen had in fact encountered exactly such students.

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[42] Enno Littmann, « Das Verbum der Tigre-Sprache », *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 13 (1890), p. 140.

[43] Vater, *Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass*, p. IX: « wo aus dem ganzen nördlichen Afrika vom Nil bis zum Atlantischen Ocean, und von dem mittelländischen Meere bis zum Senegal, Gülby und bis südwärts von Habesch bis Singebar theils Reisende auf ihrer Pilgerfahrt nach Mekka und Medina ansprechen, theils der Studien und des Handels wegen sich aufhalten. », translated from German by the author. See also the earlier note by Seetzen himself expressing the same idea: Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, « Vorbericht zu den Beyträgen zur Kenntniss der unbekannten Länder von Afrika », in *Monatliche Correspondenz zur Beförderung der Erd- und Himmelskunde* 33 (April 1810), p. 320-330, here p. 321.

[44] Seetzen himself underlines this: « Kahira ist für einen forschenden Geographen ein sehr wichtiger Ort, indem man hier nach und nach Reisende aus dem ganzen nördlichen Afrika [...] antreffen könnte » (« Cairo is a very important location for a geographer carrying out research, as one can subsequently encounter travellers coming from all over northern Africa »), Seetzen, « Vorbericht », p. 321.

[45] Abdulkader, « Ǧäbärti », here p. 597: « In the 15th century a *riwāq* (a section for scholarly Islamic learning) was established at al-Azhar University … later the name was changed into *Riwāq al-Ǧabarta* to include all Muslim students from Ethiopia and Somalia ». See also Alessandro Gori, « Islam in Africa Orientale: Crisi Islamica e/o Crisi dell'islam? », *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, 62/3 (Settembre 2007), p. 429–438, here p. 435: students from the Horn of Africa were institutionally affiliated to the *Riwāq al-Ǧabartī* of al-Azhar (see also p. 436 on shaykh ʿAbdallāh al-Hararī from Ethiopia, an Islamic scholar and founder of a religious movement in the Lebanon, who had studied at al-Azhar; see on his background and his studies Haggai Erlich, « ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Hararī », in Alessandro Bausi, Siegbert Uhlig et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. V, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2014, p. 210–211).

Another important remark by Seetzen is his mention of the traders. Cairo has to be imagined at this time as an ancient centre of Muslim trading networks that had not yet been heavily disrupted by the competition posed by Europeans along the seacoasts of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean or the partial break-down of trade relations that later arose in the era of colonialism. These traders, evidently, were attracted by Cairo as it served as a hub for international trade at the crossroads of the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, Arabic states and inner African countries, the latter of which were linked to Egypt through northern African caravan routes and along the Nile route as well as the Red Sea coast.

It is important to underscore in this context that the Red Sea was a centre of Muslim travel: Any pilgrim on the way to Mecca coming from northern Africa or other African regions would need to cross the Red Sea by using caravan arrangements and boats travelling along Red Sea coasts. All of this travel necessitated a high degree of social, cultural and political institutionalisation of travel organisation and travel knowledge. Seetzen's lists, even if they do not actually focus on these aspects, provide a telling glimpse into this non-European internationality. In sum, Cairo was a cultural and socio-political metropolis for non-European travellers who spoke a large number of different languages and were welcomed by a local culture that had embraced this internationality. The multitude of languages from Ethiopia and the countries surrounding Ethiopia that Seetzen documented in Cairo clearly illustrate this point.

Notwithstanding, this analysis in not a wholescale rejection of the notion that there were also slaves and that Seetzen may have encountered them. But, the idea that Seetzen (in this context imagined as a well-educated European explorer) had only encountered totally illiterate slaves (imagined as persons with almost no linguistic capacities?) would be a mis-reading of his encounters with this very diverse community of non-European travellers in Cairo. The imagined hierarchy we see here is certainly at least partially wrong. Indeed, Vater remarks, after citing the above-mentioned quote by Seetzen, that these travellers were « more or less fluent in Arabic, [which is why] they were more able to provide information on their own languages than the black slaves, who had been brought to the city from Dârfûr and rarely understood enough Arabic after their arrival to be able to communicate well. Moreover, most of them had also been taken away from their home countries at too early an age to be able to communicate in a sufficiently reliable way about their own languages ».[46] Later readers seem to have misread this commentary, assuming then that Seetzen's informants and research partners

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[46] VATER, *Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass*, p. IX: « Des Arabischen mehr oder weniger kundig, sind diese geschickter zur Auskunft über ihre Sprachen, als die dorthin aus Dârfûr gebrachten Negersclaven, die bei ihrer Ankunft selten Arabisch genug verstehen, um sich verständlich zu machen, und oft schon zu früh aus ihrem Vaterlande weggeführt sind, als dass sie ihre eigne Sprache rein mittheilen könnten », translated from German by the author.

(as we should call them) had mostly been slaves. It is quite likely that they may have simply not thought of the possibility that there was such a massive presence of non-European travellers and students in Cairo – some of them well-experienced in international travel – during this pre-colonial era.

Later in his commentary, Vater also noted that he wished that other Europeans would also dare to start documenting the languages in other African regions and settlements as Seetzen had done, even if it could not be expected that they would encounter as many languages as Seetzen in Cairo.[47] Vater's remark and the tone of his comments also help us to make one more observation regarding Seetzen, notably that his scientific approach was guided by a spirit of appreciation for the linguistic diversity of humanity and a desire to document this, without any reference to any « primitivity » or « ignorance ». Even the partial ignorance of slaves that he mentions is explained through the fact that they had been uprooted, not by an assumption of their cultural inferiority. Seetzen's work on these languages thus does not betray any kind of hierarchical imagination in which Seetzen saw himself in a superior position. Rather, he appears to be an intellectually curious interlocutor who engaged at great length with his linguistic partners, even if his notes do not tell us much about these actual encounters. Seetzen's capacity to engage in human interaction and his readiness to perceive Cairo's internationality as an important resource is nonetheless evident from the great diversity of the documented languages, which clearly stemmed from people with the most diverse backgrounds and quite different levels of knowledge, as well as from the absence of any racial slurs. There were other fellow travellers who had seen nothing of this diversity.

Moreover, Seetzen's collection aptly demonstrates that essentialist perspectives on language names are problematic: Seetzen is not simply « wrong » when using a specific denomination that does not correspond to the denomination established today as the only correct one for a given language. His use of words, ethnonyms, and toponyms rather reflect, as we have seen, a fluid reality of non-formal speaking and parlance; they speak to a specific reality which did exist and does exist within which terminologies may be used in a way that does not correspond to what we believe that a language should be called from our present-day perspective. Although Seetzen himself was probably unaware, the orality of his documentation in his lists offers quite authentic insights into actual language use.

For example, such an approach which just looks into a language's denomination from today's perspective leads to the quite surprising – and wrong – identification of Seetzen's « Gibberty » as a Somali dialect that we find in

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[47]   VATER, *Dr. Seetzen's linguistischer Nachlass*, p. IX–X.

literature referring to Seetzen.[48] A simple check of this language informed by only some very basic knowledge of Somali (Cushitic) and Amharic (Ethio-Semitic), however, would immediately reveal that Seetzen was documenting quite usual Amharic here. This language denomination is – as said above – not a « mistake » committed by Seetzen, but rather it documents the actual use of the term Jeberti within a number of (Muslim) identities linked with very different languages, enriched here by another example for this praxis. In modern literature there are references to a northern Somali group called Gabarti, which is the reason for the confusion in the literature. In this case Seetzen uses the term « Gibberty » for the language spoken by an Amharic-speaker, which is evidently more or less the same term. Some explanations on this are necessary: generally, long-term studies of groups in the region, such as of the Gabarti, show that group names were occasionally travelling over large distances and were sometimes used by groups speaking totally different languages (while these groups did have connections some time back in history, be it ethnic, occupational or some form of inter-ethnic clan relations).

Languages in Northeastern Africa rarely had a fixed general denomination, as we also see in this example: People often simply called their language after their group's name or their region of origin. As mentioned above, the term Jeberti normally refers to Muslim traders who spoke Tigriñña or Amharic in the Ethiopian highlands; those assuring the trade connecting Christian Ethiopia with the outside world were of great importance for assuring economic stability in the region and the flow of information. As trade via the Sudanese Nile route and along the Red Sea was mainly in the hands of Muslims, Muslim trading groups in the Christian

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48 See Gene Balford Gragg, « Lexicography of the Cushitic Languages », in Franz Joseph Hausmann, Oskar Reichmann, Herbert Ernst Wiegand et al. (eds.), *Wörterbücher – Dictionaries – Dictionnaires. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Lexikographie*, vol. III, Berlin – New York 1991, p. 2461–2469, here p. 2461. See also Jakobi, « Seetzen der Sprachensammler »: for example, she lists Seetzen's language denominations together with her interpretations: « Sprachen, von denen Seetzen Wortlisten gesammelt hat, 'Phalatija', 'Szauaken', 'Tahâsse', 'Tiggrý', 'Gibbérty', 'Argubba' und die beiden nilnubischen Sprachen 'Berberisch' und 'Dúngalisch'... », which she equals with « Ful, Beja, Tigre, Tigrinya, Somali, Gurage sowie Nubisch (Nobiin und Dongolawi) » – thus mixing up Seetzen's Gibbérty with Somali. She also lists some words from the 'Gibbérty' language without further identification (from Seetzen, « Über das Land Jédschu in Habbésch »), and notes: « Ungeklärt ist noch die Identität von Seetzen's 'Gibberty,' daher das Fragezeichen ». (« The identity of Seetzen's 'Gibberty' has not been clarfified, which is why there is a question mark »). The Ethiopianist Cohen, however, had already identified the language documented by Seetzen quite a time ago as Amharic: Marcel Cohen, *Etudes d'éthiopien meridional*, Paris 1931 (Société Asiatique. Collection d'ouvrages orientaux), p. 357. On the term see: Abdulkader, « Ğäbärti », p. 597–598, to be differentiated from the Somali Gabarti, which, however, was not a term used by themselves (see on the Somali groups identified with this denomination: Giorgio Banti, « Ğäbärti », in Siegbert Uhlig et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. II, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2005, p. 598, with further references).

highlands were found all over Ethiopia in different regions. They spoke the respective language of their environs, which is why a « Jeberti » would for example speak Amharic. The term has its own interesting history, which shall not be discussed here, but reflects a long history of trade linking the hinterland to numerous coasts – including the Somali coast of the Indian Ocean. Seetzen's connection of Amharic (not yet called « Amharic » by all its speakers in that period, as we see also in this example) with a Jeberti group adds one aspect to the history of this network of people – one of whom was Seetzen's partner in language documentation.

This observation leads us again back to the term « oral geography », or more precisely the system of ethnic and geographical references in colloquial language terms: Seetzen's collection of terms is precious, as it simply and naively documents what people were telling him – without him correcting them under the influence of a known standard or an established language term. This leads us to exactly the observation mentioned above: People regularly called their language after their group's name or the region of origin, i.e. within a local system of ethnic-geographical territorial concepts, which we can illustrate through several of the language denominations used by Seetzen. Geographical and ethnic-territorial concepts are used for language denomination. A good example is the language treated in this article: « Sprache von Tiggrý », which corresponds exactly to how the term is called still today in traditional settings in central Tigray (« q^wanq^wa Tɨgray », i.e. 'language of Tɨgray'); the term « Tɨgrɨñña » which is by now the usual term used in standard publications and official discourse in Ethiopia and Eritrea is a rather recent term, constructed based on Amḥarɨñña – while in the countryside a much more geographical and region-based system of language denominations can still be observed, as recent studies show – according to regions, people would call their dialect rather vaguely after a much more general term encompassing many groups (q^wanq^wa Ḥabesha), or after their precise area (such as Rayyɨnna in Rayya [49] etc., which Seetzen mentions in his geographical report based on information from the « Gibbérty »-speaker, who gave him information about the routes to neighbouring Muslim countries[50] and mentioned « Réija » as a place in the province of « Tikkry », i.e. Tɨgray).[51] The reference to Tɨgray in Seetzen's language denomination follows the described system of geography-based language denominations: Historically, the term Tɨgray just referred to the center of the Tɨgrɨñña-speaking provinces, which all had their own regional identities from Ḥamasen to Rayya, but were often altogether called « Tɨgray », by outsiders

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[49] On the self-designation of the language variant of Rayya and the multiple identities of different Tɨgrɨñña-speaking groups: Smidt, « Tigrinnya-speakers across the Borders ».

[50] See on this geographical information provided by the Jeberti interviewed by Seetzen, the footnote 7 above (Seetzen, « Über das Land Jédschu in Habbésch », p. 351–352).

[51] Seetzen, « Über das Land Jédschu in Habbésch », p. 352.

due to their shared language. This denomination became dominant only because Tɨgray was the political centre, with the seat of the most important prince respectively governor.

There are a number of similar cases in Seetzen's lists: the « Sprache von Szauaken » is also not denominated with a proper language denomination, but with a geographical reference, to the port town of Sawakin.[52] Again this should be understood as a reflection of an actual local practice of geography-focused language denominations, in this case by a local group of the North Cushitic-speaking Beja. Systematically, this also corresponds to the denomination of the Amharic word list as « Gibberty », as the identification with the specific group decides about language denomination, not an abstract larger (linguistic) concept of belonging to a language. This, finally, also solves the mystery of the somehow puzzling denomination of the Sɨlt'e Wolane language as « Sprache von Argúbba in Habbésch » – while Argobba is today known as the denomination of another language, spoken by the Muslim Argobba living at the fringes of the Amharic-speaking Ethiopian highlands (which corresponds to the historical term « Habbésch »):[53] the Argobba area is historically important as a crossroad of Muslim traders connecting the Ethiopian highland with large networks of trade

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[52] JAKOBI, « Seetzen der Sprachensammler », rightly notes that Seetzen repeatedly uses place names to denominate languages: « Die Namen, die Seetzen zur Bezeichnung der von ihm dokumentierten Sprachen verwendet, sind meist keine Sprachnamen im engeren Sinn, sondern – wie etwa im Fall von 'Szuaken' – Ortsbezeichnungen, hier der Name der am Roten Meer gelegenen Stadt Suakin/Sawakin, woher Seetzens Beja-Informant stammte. » – She also adds, that so far an explanations for these choices has not been undertaken: « Eine detaillierte Aufschlüsselung und Erläuterung der Namen, die Seetzen seinen Sprachen gegeben hat, steht noch aus. »

[53] The term « Habbésch » is itself derived from an Arabic derivation from the local « Ḥabesha »; it is not surprising that the Ethiopian inhabitants of Cairo would use this term when referring to their country. Seetzen is also clearly using geographical information coming from his Oromo counterpart when he refers to his language as « Sprache der Galla westwärts von Habbésch », with which he asserts that this language is spoken outside « Habbésch », in regions to the west of it (which is correct of we look at it from the perspective of the southern regions of « Habbésch », such as Shewa and Argobba). The fact that he uses the term « Galla » (a pejorative term which is not a self-denomination used by the members of the group themselves), is to be explained by the fact that due to contacts with Ethiopian highlanders, Europeans had already started, from the 17th century onwards, to use this term when referring to the Oromo. In this case, Seetzen does not document the self-denomination of the language, but instead chooses to refer to an already known term. On this ethnic-geographical term, referring mainly to the Ethiopian highlands inhabited by the « Ḥabesha », i.e. mainly Amharic- and Tɨgriñña-speakers (from which also the term « Abyssinia » is derived), WOLBERT G.C. SMIDT, « Selbstbezeichnungen von Təgrəñña-Sprechern (Ḥabäša, Tägaru, Təgrəñña u.a.) », in BOGDAN BURTEA, JOSEF TROPPER, HELEN YOUNANSARDAROUD (eds.), *Studia semitica et Semitohamitica. Festschrift Rainer Voigt*, Ugarit-Verlag, Münster 2005, p. 385–404; WOLBERT G.C. SMIDT, « The Term Ḥabäša: An Ancient Ethnonym of the 'Abyssinian' Highlanders », in HATEM ELLIESIE (ed.), *Multidisciplinary Views on the Horn of Africa*, Köppe Verlag, Köln 2014 (Studien zum Horn von Afrika, 1), p. 37–69.

routes, which also means that we should not imagine this area as ethnically and linguistically homogeneous. Again, the Muslim S̶i̶lt'e-speaker who was interviewed by Seetzen, must have followed the principle described here: referring to his area of origin to denominate his language. In this sense, the word lists of Northeaster-African languages are witnesses of a specific ethnic-territorial concept of identities still known today from mainly rural settings, defying official discourses of unified larger ethnic or language groups – i.e. an oral geography « from below », expressed through self-denominations. In addition, as demonstrated above, Seetzen's lists also provide a wealth of geographical vocabulary referring to settlement patterns (such as the term *'addi*, 'settled area' or similar, as discussed above). These provide insights into the geographical reality on the ground, as they document the use of specific territorial concepts.

In conclusion, as this article has demonstrated with its reading of Seetzen's contributions to language documentation, we need to explore new perspectives on these early nineteenth-century research endeavours undertaken by travellers like Seetzen. Despite a high degree of naivety, it is precisely this untrained and very personal approach of Seetzen that had produced a valuable set of original material helping to understand the informal parlance of this period (which actually proves to be very similar to the one found in today's rural context in Tigray), which in turn enables the mapping of what is referred to here as an « oral geography »: A geography of topo- and ethnonyms used in informal exchanges of information and experiences that *reflect an authentic local understanding of terms and locations.* The « dense » new methodology of ethnographic research that was adopted by Seetzen, which necessitated a close personal relationship with informants, offers illustrative insights into contemporary world views – even if there are some problematic shortcomings in proper linguistic documentation or vocabulary comprehension. Seetzen's lists indirectly reveal the existence of (otherwise rarely reported) international networks of exchange, trade, and migration in Northeastern Africa that linked the metropolitan city of Cairo with numerous neighbouring countries all over Northeastern Africa. Through Seetzen's documentations, we can detect the presence of African research partners and scholars (not just « informants ») who were willing to cooperate with the European researcher, thus opening a gateway for knowledge about African realities that could be reported back to a Europe still rather detached from the multinational realities of the Eastern Mediterranean and Indian Ocean world.

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