

## Gene Gragg

The morphological database project **Gene Gragg** reported on last year has now officially become the “Cushitic-Omotc Morphological Archive” project (which felicitously or infelicitously yields the acronym “COMA”), supported by a Mellon Foundation Emeritus grant. COMA is to be a comparative-historical reference archive of all available morphological information on the Cushitic-Omotc languages, ultimately in their Afroasiatic context as part of the linguistic pre-history of the ancient Near East. The current phase aims at producing by the grant’s end a digital reference work: “The Major Inflectional Categories of Cushitic: Part 1, Verb and Pronoun.” Current work focuses on archiving all published sources of original data since the work of Almkvist and Reinisch in the 1870s and 1880s. Eventually the project aims at including unpublished material from field notes and reports archived in university collections in Europe and elsewhere. Underlying the project is the hope, expressed in the proposal, that concomitant work on the structure and query/display interface of the archive will result in “a tool for the organization, manipulation, and contrastive and analytical display of paradigmatic data, both within and among these language, and thus an instructive model for ways of dealing with large amounts of comparative morphological data.”

As a first result of this project, Gragg was able to report to the 5th International Conference on Cushitic and Omotic held in Paris, April 16–18, 2008, in a paper, “Cushitic Verb Inflectional Classes Revisited,” that aspects of Semitic/Berber-like internal inflection hitherto thought to be limited to the northernmost Beja branch (an ethnic group known already to the ancient Egyptians), are clearly recognizable in a distant cousin spoken in Kenya, and thus probably reconstructed for the family as a whole. A survey of another feature, negative verb conjugation, is being prepared for an upcoming meeting in Turin.

In this context, a relevant article from a recent conference has appeared in published form: “What Kind of Speech Community Is Represented by the ‘Cushitic’ Node?: Introduction to the Lexical Evidence” in *Akten des 7. internationalen Semitohamitistenkongresses (VII. ISHaK), Berlin 13. bis 15. September 2004* (= *Semitica et Semitohamitica Berloinensia* 5), edited by Rainer Voigt (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2007), pp. 211–36.

Finally, Gragg and Rebecca Hasselbach were the co-conveners and organizers of the 36th North American Conference on Afroasiatic Linguistics, held at Holiday Inn Chicago Mart Plaza, March 16–18.