RESEARCH

Gene Gragg

As reported in *News & Notes* (Spring 1996), the Cushitic etymological database project (Cushlex) has evolved in two directions. In scope, it has become part of a larger project, the Afroasiatic Index, a comparative-historical database of languages of the Afroasiatic (AA) group, (current emphasis on Cushitic, Semitic, and Egyptian—collaboration being investigated for Berber and Chadic). We have shifted from stand-alone PC database to the medium of the Internet, with a World-Wide Web browser interface. The first move was motivated by the fact that, as a relatively loose cluster of Northeast African languages that began differentiating at an early stage in the Afroasiatic family history, cognates between the major branches of Cushitic tend to show general Afroasiatic reflexes. The move to the Internet was motivated in large part by the fact that it solved what was beginning to loom as a major bottleneck in PC diskette-based distribution—a huge variety of platforms and constantly evolving graphic interface software norms. By moving to the World-Wide Web, the interface and platform problems become the domain of the makers and distributors of web browser software. A prototype of the Semitic "module" of the Afroasiatic Index has been available since the fall of 1995 at the Oriental Institute's home page, http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/PROJ/CUS/AAindex.html. An initial view of the Cushitic data is scheduled to be uploaded to the web by September. Throughout much of this year, **Gene Gragg** has been developing programs for lexical textual and lexical information retrieval in the context of the Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions project. The programs, and lexical markup standards being developed here are directly applicable to the Afroasiatic Index program. Hopefully the two projects will make useful models available for scholarly editions of electronic texts and lexical reference works. Otherwise, Gragg gave a paper, "Root Fossils and Root Alternates," at the meeting of the North American Conference on Afroasiatic Linguistics, held in conjunction with the American Oriental Society Meeting at the University of Pennsylvania in March; contributed a translation of "The Heron and the Turtle: Sumerian Fable" to a volume, *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions and Archival Documents from the Biblical*

World, being edited by W. Hallo; and a short study of a possible Old Ethiopic text, "Ostracon from BE95-5," for Steven Sidebotham's *Berenice Excavation Report*.