



# Origin of “Semitic” Languages

by

Adel S. Bishtawi

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The unity of what is traditionally called Semitic languages may be traced in the roots, in the inflections, and in the general features of the syntax. Almost a thousand years before the publication in 1781 of *Repertorium fuer biblische und morgenlaendische Literatur*, linguists studying certain features of Canaanite (Phoenician), Hebrew, Arabic, and Ethiopic (Habaši) noted the interrelationship of these languages. Other studies pointed to a prehistoric ancestral origin for these and more than sixty other languages, first named *Ursemitische* and later *Proto-Semitic*. Research involving the history of the Arabic numerals established their prehistoric origin and confirmed a linguistic link between small numbers and small words. The scope and depth of the multilayered research were expanded in an attempt to identify the origin of Semitic languages and, probably, the origin of languages. It took more than two years to realise that the pioneering linguists of Arabic were not aware of the main building blocks of the language they treated and that the smaller biconsonantals, not triconsonantals as is widely believed, were the original roots of the Semitic languages. At one time in the remotest horizon of their history, the language consisted of a very limited number of biconsonantals and monosyllabic root morphemes. Words expressing the basic needs of primitive man, such as water, food, hut, stone, danger, etc., could be several thousand years older than the oldest attested Semitic language (i.e., Akkadian) or several tens of thousands.

Akkadian, Phoenician, Aramaic, and Arabic are formidable communicative tools, yet their biconsonantal roots, or linguistic nuclei, were found to be surprisingly small. Four hundred and thirty roots were identified in two categories, primaries and secondaries. Most are paired in units constituting the main body in the larger linguistic clusters, tens of which were listed and discussed in the *Origin of Semitic Languages*.

With what could be the greatest linguistic secret in history now unveiled, other important surprises may follow. With careful etymological analysis of linguistic nuclei, many of which were adapted or borrowed from animals and ancient environment, the true origin of scores of biblical names and ancient locations can be more correctly identified. Moreover, new windows can be opened on the various aspects of early societies to provide what appears to be a sufficiently clear picture of the first steps on the long road to civilisation and, probably, human consciousness.

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