advanced research and a monument to the recognized importance of language usage and language teaching.

Southern Nilotic History: Linguistic Approaches to the Study of the Past. CHRISTOPHER EHRET. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971. xiv + 200 pp., figure, maps, 8 appendices, bibliography, index. $10.50 (cloth).

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This book is a reconstruction of the history (read "prehistory" if you prefer) of Southern Nilotic speaking peoples of East Africa. The history, drawn in broad outline, spans the time from their earliest origins to the beginning of the colonial period. The reconstruction is based primarily on linguistic materials, but analyzed in the context of available historical, geographical, and ethnological data about the S. Nilotes and neighboring peoples.

The introductory chapter identifies the modern S. Nilotes (the Dadog of Tanzania and Kalenjin of Kenya) and sets out the aims of the work and the nature of the evidence on which it is based. Chapter 2 outlines the techniques by which historical inferences are to be drawn from linguistic evidence. In Chapter 3, the author sets up a relative chronology of historical periods with absolute dates provided by a kind of glottochronology. The history proper begins with Chapter 4, in which the author located the original homeland of the S. Nilotes (on the borders of modern Kenya, Sudan, and Ethiopia, well north of their present location), reconstructs aspects of their inherited Nilotic culture, and demonstrates their subjection to heavy E. Cushitic influences. Chapter 5 describes the subsequent movement of these people southward into Kenya and their contact first with S. Cushites and then with Bantu speakers. Chapter 6 describes the ancestors of the present S. Nilotes as they expand and become the dominant peoples in western and central Kenya. Chapter 7 describes the modern Dadog and their rise and fall as a major group in Tanzania. Chapters 8 and 9 treat the recent history of the more numerous Kalenjin, of special interest being their fluctuating relations with the Masai. In the final chapter, the author summarizes his findings and paints a particularly clear picture of his overall view of S. Nilotic history. The text of 85 pages is followed by 100 pages of appendices containing linguistic reconstructions and lists of loanwords from and into S. Nilotic languages.

According to the author, the book has two aims: (1) to describe S. Nilotic history, and (2) to demonstrate the usefulness of linguistics as a tool for the historian. As a history, the book is a remarkable tour de force. Using mainly linguistic evidence, the author locates populations, moves them around, determines their relative influence vis-à-vis their neighbors, and reconstructs aspects of their culture, from basic economy to the practice of extracting incisors. The book aroused in me the same incredulity and amazement that one gets in reading a detailed description of some elaborate pre-Columbian society based on a collection of potsherds and other "extraneous" matter! Like an early archaeological description, the importance of this book lies not in its being correct but in paving the way for future work. The broad scope of the work and its wealth of interesting hypotheses will insure it an important place in the field of East African history.

As an "essay in methodology," on the other hand, the work is a disappointment. The problem is not in the lack of explication, but in the author's uncritical approach to the linguistic techniques he employs. For example, having identified the loss of /r/ before /i/ as a supposedly regular sound change in Proto-S. Nilotic, he blithely pinpoints it in time and then uses this event as his lodestar for establishing time sequences, dating the introduction of iron, identifying now-extinct populations, etc.—all the time oblivious to the fact that "simple" sound changes often have complex histories (complex in time and in space) and often lend themselves to a variety of interpretations. While the author appreciates the historical potential of techniques such as Wörter und Sachen, linguistic seriation, and linguistic acculturation—the terms are mine, not his—he shows no sign that he is aware of the flaws in these methods or of the difficulties and dangers in their application.
This naiveté has to be ascribed to the author’s inexplicable ignorance of the abundant literature on these matters. His bibliography on “Methodology and Theory” contains a paltry seven titles, essentially limited to the classic works of Bloomfield, Meillet, Sapir, and Weinreich. The most shocking disregard for the literature is found in the author’s treatment of dating. As a means of calculating absolute dates, he presents a familiar system of cognate counting within a basic vocabulary, without ever mentioning lexicostatistics or Swadesh or any of the other scholars who have criticized, modified, utilized and/or rejected this dating technique over the past twenty years.

How is it possible, then, that this still remains an important historical study? The answer lies in the triumph of art over science, of intuition over empiricism, of imagination over methodology. In the final analysis, it is the triumph of the talented chef who turns out a remarkable meal, but whose cookbook is not to be recommended at any price.