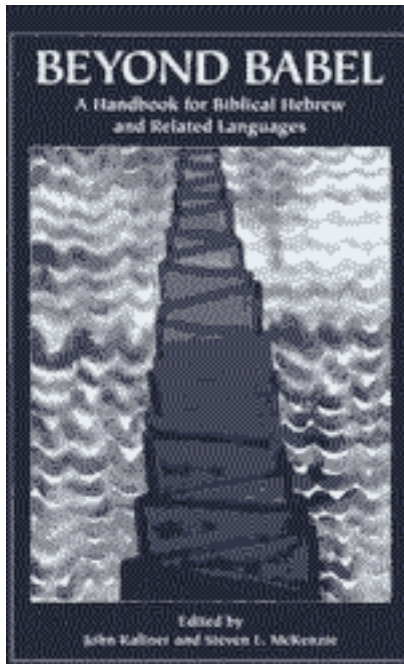


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Kaltner, John, and Steven L. McKenzie, eds.

*Beyond Babel: A Handbook for Biblical Hebrew and Related Languages*

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Often students beginning their studies of the Hebrew Bible are assailed with such a multitude of new terms that they feel as though half their time is spent learning the lingo of the academy. *Beyond Babel: A Handbook for Biblical Hebrew and Related Languages* can relieve some of this initial discomfort. The book is a collection of articles on languages pertinent to the study of the Hebrew Bible. As such, each chapter has a description of a language, an explication of its relevance for biblical studies, and a description of ancient and modern resources. Each language is handled by a noted scholar in the field: David Marcus on Akkadian; Simon Parker on Ammonite, Edomite, and Moabite; John Kaltner on Arabic; Fredrick Greenspahn on Aramaic; Donald Redford on Egyptian; Jo Ann Hackett on Biblical and Epigraphic Hebrew; Baruch Levine on Postbiblical Hebrew; Harry Hoffner on Hittite; Charles Krahmalkov on Phoenician; and Peggy Day on Ugaritic. Further, the volume has an extensive linguistic introduction by John Huehnergard.

Though by mandate each chapter contains a description of the language, its relevance, and a list of resources, there is a fair bit of variation between articles. Such variation is to be expected in a volume dealing with such disparate corpuses of material as Arabic and

Moabite. Yet at the same time the differences are more substantial than simply reflecting the amount of epigraphic material available. For example, some authors provide verbal paradigms (Akkadian, Arabic, Aramaic), and two even provide text examples (Akkadian, Postbiblical Hebrew). While the differences seem to be as much a function of scholarly taste as textual remains, they do not take away from the usefulness of the volume. Indeed, the lack of wooden conformity adds a breath of fresh air on a volume of essentially dead languages.

The introduction by John Huehnergard provides a general orientation to the linguistic landscape. Its focus is specifically in on Semitic languages and helps to orient the reader to their relationships with charts of Proto-Semitic phonemes and graphs depicting the various groupings of languages. The bibliography to this article in itself could serve as the basis for a class on comparative Semitics.

David Marcus's article on Akkadian was interesting but somewhat flawed. He pedantically does not include the perfect verb in the verbal paradigm but rather notes in passing that "[i]n some dialects the *t*-infix expresses the past tense" (27). Yet at the same time he makes the blanket generalization that *t*-stems are reflexive, while in truth this is only the case in the G (in the derived stems the *t*-forms are usually passive). Though both statements are arguably true, a greater consistency would have been beneficial.

John Kaltner spends a large portion of his article on Arabic warning against the siren song of quick (and false) etymological equivalents. He holds that biblical scholars often fail to use classical sources in their search of Arabic equivalents to Semitic words. Hence, they wind up citing as a cognate an Arabic word that may in fact have come from the language in question (be it Hebrew, Ugaritic or the like) or is the result of internal changes within the Arabic language. To prove his point of how easy etymological errors occur, he uses examples culled from Koehler and Baumgartner's *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Yet for all of his cautions and description of correct methodological procedures for the use of the Arabic language, Kaltner also provides one of the most detailed exposition in the entire volume on the actual language itself.

The article on Ammonite, Edomite, and Moabite is arguably the least useful to the volume in terms of the light it sheds on the Bible. However, this is no reflection on Simon Parker's article. It combines careful scholarship with useful information. The fact of the matter is that there is much that we do not know about the closest cousins to the Hebrew language.

Both Donald Redford and Harry Hoffner, writing on Egyptian and Hittite respectively, give mostly historical information concerning their languages. They write on the history

of discovery and decipherment rather than on phonology and syntax. It is unclear if this is because these two languages are non-Semitic or if the languages are too complex to even be given cursory treatment in the space allowed. Regardless, both articles provide extensive description of modern and ancient sources. In particular, Hoffner notes not only grammars and lexicons of Hittite but those of Luwian and Hurrian texts from the Hatti lands as well.

Peggy Day's article on Ugaritic seemed quite short, considering the importance of this language both to the study of early Hebrew and early Israelite religion. However, she does include a discussion and decipherment of the complex system of sigla by which the Ugaritic texts are referred.

On the whole the editors of the book are to be applauded for their use of both linguistic and cultural criteria in choosing languages for this volume. It is not often that one finds a volume of this nature that deals with such dissimilar languages as Hittite and Arabic. One strange discrepancy in the volume is the lack of certain languages that are often used in comparative analysis, specifically Sumerian, Greek, and, to a lesser extent, Persian. Their exclusions are understandable. Sumerian is still a poorly understood language, and Greek is perhaps used more for text-critical work than for comparative literature or linguistics. Yet both are quite important, and though each provides its own difficulties, both are arguably at least as important for the study of the Hebrew Bible as Ammonite, Edomite, and Moabite.

On the whole, the greatest asset of *Beyond Babel* is the extensive (and often annotated) bibliographies for each language. These bibliographies in truth serve two purposes. First, they inform the reader what tools scholars in the field find most useful. Further, they help remind the reader that reading a summary of a language (even if it contains extensive charts) does not allow one to immediately go and tackle a text. As is often quoted, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. The editors seem to have had this proverb in mind when organizing this volume.