

ROGER D. WOODARD, Ed. *The ancient languages of Syria-Palestine and Arabia*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xix, 262.

This is one of five volumes derived from the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages* (2006), from the same editor and publisher. The eight chapters, prepared by noted specialists, are supplemented by six figures, 19 tables, and one map. The contents are indexed separately for subject, grammatical and linguistic terms, languages, and establish laws and principles referred to in the text, e.g., *Phillip's Law*, *Canaanite Shift*. The first appendix (225 – 246) provides a general discussion of the primary subgroups of Afro-Asiatic, AKA and formerly Hamito-Semitic, which offers a perspective on the extent and influence of languages in the taxon, of which the largest, most well known, and probably most important today fall in the Semitic branch, whose phonetics, morphology, syntax, and lexicon are discussed in some detail.

A prominent exception to this, of course, is Hausa, a Chaddic language which serves not only as a *lingua franca* in northern central Africa, but as a language of broadcasting and media; as Huehnergard points out (App. 1), though, that group of languages is not recorded before the modern era and thus would not be represented here. The second appendix offers the TOC of the *Encyclopedia* and of the other volumes in the present series.

We certainly agree with the remark in the Preface, “An ancient language is indeed a thing of wonder — but so is every other language” (1). Since the capacity for language is the faculty that distinguishes the category *human*, the breadth and scope of the diversity of manifestations of that faculty, along with the means to record it and extend it in space and through time, count as the supreme wonders of existence. The designation *ancient* herein is determined to be delimited by the invention of orthography, at the early end of the spectrum, to the end of the fifth century, although this admittedly somewhat arbitrary margin shifts this way and that according the facts

of a variety of the languages discussed in these volumes.

The eight chapters and Appendix 1 are listed as follows:

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|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. Language in Ancient Syria-Palestine: An Introduction | ROGER D. WOODARD              |
| 2. Ugaritic   | DENNIS PARDEE                 |
| 3. Hebrew   | P. KYLE MCCARTER, JR.         |
| 4. Phoenician and Punic                                 | JO ANN HACKETT                |
| 5. Canaanite Dialects                                   | DENNIS PARDEE                 |
| 6. Aramaic  | STUART CREASON                |
| 7. South Arabian  | NORBERT NEBES AND PETER STEIN |
| 8. Ancient North Arabian                                | M. C. A. MACDONALD            |
| Appendix 1. Afro-Asiatic                                | JOHN HUEHNERGARD              |

Apart from the fascinating history of archeological investigation that has in large part made possible linguistic research into the ancient Afro-Asiatic languages, one of the most prominent cultural facts of the region is the extensive network of both intra- and extra-regional trading relations undertaken by speakers of these languages, which, in addition to causing extensive language contact, have exerted great influence on cultural and technological development throughout the world. Witness, for example the very wide dissemination of West Semitic writing and the benefits of literacy in recipient language-cultures, followed by the spread of Islam and with it Classical Arabic and its orthography. Hebrew and Aramaic have likewise facilitated extensive cultural development and literacy across many regions of the world through the spreading influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition that they and their writing systems made possible.

The editor, in the “Introduction” retells the intriguing story of a very early experiment with language, when a pharaoh, desiring to determine who were the earliest of peoples, consulted the speech of isolated children. The articles in this volume discuss the background and history of the languages and their speakers, their orthographic records, and a summary of the history of

scholarship on the languages. The contents of these articles far exceed the facts encountered in a language encyclopedia, and provide comprehensive information about the aforementioned aspects of study, along with features of the phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon of the languages. Any student of language, anthropology, or any discipline that crosses into the history of language and culture in the region will enrich their knowledge and deepen their appreciation of history by reference to this volume.

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