

Arabische Dialektgeographie: Eine Einführung. By PETER BEHNSTEDT and MANFRED WOIDICH. Handbook of Oriental Studies, Volume 78. Leiden: Brill, 2005. Pp. xviii + 269.

This book has long been a desideratum – an encyclopedic reference work on Arabic dialect geography written by two eminently qualified Arabic dialectologists who have accomplished much fieldwork in the Arab world over long and distinguished careers. Although the volume is subtitled “an introduction,” it really is much more than that. It is more in the way of a compendium or handbook that summarizes the present state of our knowledge in the field of Arabic dialectology. It amalgamates the research efforts of older as well as more contemporary scholarship. Chapter 2, (pp. 4-7), e.g., discusses some published works relied upon by the authors. In addition to their own extensive publications, extensive use is made of the pioneering investigations of G. Bergsträsser, J. Cantineau, W. Arnold, O. Jastrow, and R. De Jong, not to mention the Arabic dialects in northern Israel project of Behnstedt, Jastrow, and the late R. Talmon and the Atlas linguistique Tunisien of Taïeb Baccouche. A perusal of the rich bibliography (pp. 219-37) demonstrates the authors’ concern for thoroughness and exacting detail.

The most valuable pages of this large volume are the wonderful maps, especially those of Chapter 13, “Wortgeographie” (pp. 185-217). Let me single out just two: (1) Karte 97 shows the distribution of the verb ‘go down’ throughout the Arab world: nzl, ḥdr, ḥwd, ḥbt, ḥwl, wṭ, dly, ḥwy, twh, trj, ndr, ḥwf, qdd, drdh, ḥny (p. 205); (2) Karten 89 lists ‘nose’: ʔnf, xšm, nxr, xnfr, xnn, xṭm, tḫm, ḥngrt, njrg, p/būz (p. 193). The most widespread root (Spain, Uzbekistan, Chad, Mali, etc.) for the first is, as one might have expected, nzl (= Modern Standard Arabic [MSA]), and for the second: ʔnf (Spain, Uzbekistan, Khorasan, Yemen, etc. = MSA as well). However, it

is important to note that except for its survival in a small pocket in Upper Egypt, Egyptian Arabic dialects use the roots xšm (= MSA xašm ‘nose; mouth’), nxr (= MSA naxara ‘snort’), and the word p/būz. M. Hinds and E Badawi note in their A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1986, p. 112), however, that this refers to the ‘snout of an animal’ and is derogatory when referring to a human’s mouth (< Persian poz).

This publication is a virtual goldmine for Arabists, Semitists, and general dialectologists. Behnstedt and Woidich are to be congratulated for producing this outstanding reference which will surely be the gold standard by which one comes to measure future dialect geography works for the Semitic and Afroasiatic languages.

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