

## Recensioni e Libri ricevuti

**Griess** Ihab Joseph, *Syntactical Comparisons Between Classical Hebrew and Classical Arabic. A Study Based on the Translation of Mohammad 'Id's Arabic Grammar*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston - Queenston - Lampeter 2008, 317-iii pp., \$ 119.95

Since the Middle Ages Arabic language has been a major resource for comparative explorations for the scholars who were working on the Hebrew Bible. This state of the matter has changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with progress in the study of the Semitic languages, particularly with the decipherment of East Semitic and Ugaritic. With the diminished relevance of Arabic its knowledge among biblical scholars has become rare. Therefore, every book that is intended to study biblical Hebrew and Arabic together is potentially a precious addition to the field. The twentieth century produced some important contributions. Worthy of mention are lexical studies by Alfred Guillaume and *The Use of Arabic in Biblical Hebrew Lexicography* by John Kaltner, who provided scholars with careful guidelines on methodology. The book under review was meant to contribute in a similar way to the comparative studies of Arabic and Biblical Hebrew at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the low level of author's grammatical sophistication does not permit one to count his book among the previously mentioned studies.

The author's choice of methodology is rather peculiar. He decided to translate an Arabic grammar by Mohammad 'Id and to comment it with comparative observations on biblical Hebrew. As one may infer from the introduction Mohammad 'Id was a professor of Arabic and Semitics at the University of Cairo in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The book chosen by Griess for his translation is 'Id's *Satisfactory Grammar* published in 1978. According to Griess this is a standard reference grammar for the students at the University of Cairo. 'Id's treatise follows the traditional Arabic conceptualization of grammar and its terminology. Traditional Arabic grammar is without doubt fascinating but at the same difficult to follow for anybody versed in modern philology. It requires constant translation of the traditional categories into modern concepts. Unfortunately, Griess does not offer any explanatory notes that would name with modern designations the phenomena discussed in the traditional Arabic terms.

The book opens with a short but essential sketch of the native study of Arabic grammar. The bulk of the book is divided unevenly into two chapters. One is dedicated to the nominal forms and another to the verbs. The latter has less than 40 pages and comprises also the discussion of the verbless sentence, emphasis and negation; consequently the verb is poorly covered.

The translation of 'Id's grammar is often difficult to follow. One example will suffice to show the difficulties that the reader needs to cope with: "A relative pronoun has to be an uttered word that its relation to other words defines its meaning and reference." (p. 67). The usefulness of the translation is also reduced by the lack

of transliteration of the Arabic words into Latin characters. Correspondingly, quotations from the Bible are in the Hebrew script. The use of the Arabic and Hebrew alphabet for the respective languages limits greatly the audience of this book. Indeed, most Biblical scholars do not read the Arabic alphabet. Similarly, one does not expect all Arabic students to know Hebrew.

Griess' exploration of the "parallels" between Arabic and Biblical Hebrew is greatly disappointing. Usually he states the existence or the lack of a particular grammatical phenomenon. If two languages exhibit a similar construction, Griess quotes a few randomly selected examples from the Hebrew Bible. Often his "parallels" are simply phenomena common to all Semitic languages.

In conclusion, the book under review may offer a glimpse into a modern version of the traditional Arabic grammar to those who are not fluent in Arabic. Unfortunately, Griess' book cannot be recommended to Biblical scholars who want to deepen their understanding of the Hebrew grammar by studying similar phenomena in Arabic.

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**Politis** Konstantinos D. (ed.), *The World of the Nabataeans. Vol. 2 of the International Conference: The World of the Herods and the Nabataeans, held at the British Museum, 17-19 April 2001* (Oriens et Occidens. Studien zu antiken Kulturkontakten und ihrem Nachleben 15), Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2007, 392 pp., foto, piante e figure nel testo.

Il convegno internazionale sui rapporti tra erodiani e nabatei tenuto alcuni anni fa al British Museum di Londra (Aprile 2001) ha portato alla formazione di due volumi di buon livello. Presento qui i risultati più significativi del secondo di tali volumi. La materia presentata è molto ampia ma di grande interesse per i cultori di Petra e dei nabatei in generale. I contributi spaziano da N. Lewis a G.W. Bowersock, da R. Wenning a J. Patrich, da D.F. Graf a J.R. Bartlett, da P.J. Parr a F. Zayadine, ciascuno specialista nella sua materia. N. Lewis, "The Rediscovery of Petra, 1807-1818" (pp. 9-24), rilegge le pagine lasciate dai tre protagonisti che per primi in tempi moderni hanno visitato e documentato Petra. Si tratta di U.J. Seetzen, J.L. Burckhardt e W.J. Bankes. G.W. Bowersock, "Epilog" (pp. 385-387), mette una parola conclusiva sull'intera esposizione: "Clearly the World of the Nabataeans is growing in size and clarity with every passing year, and the conference documented here will stand as a milestone in this progress".

Tra gli studi che mi sembrano più meritevoli di essere indicati nella segnalazione, anzitutto quello di R. Wenning, "The Nabataeans in History" (pp. 25-44), che rimanda a G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, Cambridge MA 1983, quale studio fondamentale per la ricostruzione della storia dei nabatei. Il mistero sulla loro origine continua ad agitare il sonno degli studiosi di questo popolo. I nabatei