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**Book review:**

**Izre'el, Shlomo and Rina Drory Israel, eds. *Israel Oriental Studies XV: Language and Culture in the Near East*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995.**

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some other Arabian dialects . . . in Central Asian Arabic . . . and in some Saharan dialects . . ." (p. 50)? For those nonspecialists simply interested in Najdi Arabic, this information is irrelevant, or if this feature is relevant for them, then many other peculiarities of the dialect should have been similarly pointed out on this comparative basis; meanwhile, the specialist will note the descriptive fact and use it for his or her own purposes and probably does not need the special prompting.

This is true for Classical Arabic because references to Classical Arabic implicitly presuppose a diachronic model that needs to be justified on its own merits. For example, Ingham (p. 13) points out that in contrast to Classical Arabic, the glottal stop has disappeared in Najdi Arabic. It may be asked, however, whether this formulation correctly recapitulates the diachronic development. Apart from a few attestations in Yemen, there are no dialects anywhere that have a glottal stop etymological with the glottal stop of Classical Arabic. This fact alone suggests that at the time of the Arabic diaspora (ca. 650 A.D.) there already existed glottal-stop-less dialects spread in all directions from the Arabian peninsula. Furthermore, it is well attested, both in the works of the earliest Arabic grammarians and in early Arabic orthography (including Koranic orthography), that there were early varieties of Arabic that did not have the glottal stop. Did, then, the glottal stop actually disappear from the ancestral versions of Najdi Arabic, or were its forebears one of those varieties which never had it? The answer is not self-evident, and because it is not Ingham's formulation, speaking of "disappearance" is infelicitous. Similar problems could be cited in a number of instances where comparisons to Classical Arabic are made.

I should emphasize that the two themes to which these criticisms relate play a far more central role in this review than they do in Ingham's own work. I have included them here not to criticize the present work but rather to criticize a tradition that too often allows linguistically dubious or irrelevant statements to punctuate descriptive grammars.

### References

- Owens, Jonathan  
1989 The Syntactic Basis of Arabic Word Classification. *Arabica* 36:211-34.

**Language and Culture in the Near East.** Edited by SHLOMO IZRE'EL and RINA DRORY ISRAEL. *Oriental Studies* 15. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995. Pp. 279. \$89.75 (cloth).

Reviewed by Scott B. Noegel, *Rice University*

It has become somewhat customary in recent linguistic circles to recognize the social and cultural dynamics behind modern language use and the relationship between the form of a discourse and its context. Few researchers, however, have examined the interconnectedness of these matrices in Near Eastern languages, especially in the medieval and ancient periods. To be sure, there are, as the editors of this volume admit, "obvious difficulties in trying to reconstruct far removed cultural contexts when all the linguistic documentation in our possession is textual, and often not readily available" (p. 7), yet this should not deter scholars from such interdisciplinary work, for it promises infinite contributions to the fields of sociolinguistics, anthropology, and semiotics. This volume is an excellent case in point.

Rina Drory Israel opens the six-article section of the volume titled "Reconstructing the Cultural Setting from Textual Evidence" with an examination of the sociolinguistic context of the Hebrew and Arabic introductions to *Sefer Ha-Egron*, the Hebrew lexicon

compiled by Saadia Gaon (882–942 C.E.). Israel demonstrates how Saadia's word choice functioned to influence his audience's understanding of its own culture. In his Arabic preface, Saadia justified his lexicon on the basis of a "conceptual framework which was commonplace in contemporary philosophical and theological discussions, like those of the Mut'azilites and Kalam masters" (p. 14). In this manner, he asserted the importance of cultivating knowledge by utilizing the nomenclature of these disciplines. His language and content suggest his intended audience to be a group of scholars.

In the Hebrew introduction, however, he omits the philosophical framework found in the Arabic introduction, and instead describes the forgetting of Hebrew as a transgression before God. Even the time span covered in the Hebrew introduction is "immense, embracing past, present, and future" (p. 20). Instead of spicing his arguments with philosophical buzzwords and rhetoric, Saadia appropriates biblical language. Indeed, "from the national perspective, observation of the surrounding Arab culture seems irrelevant" (p. 21). His ability to navigate between two cultural worldviews, argues Israel, determined his word choice and framework of discourse.

Hannes D. Galter's "Cuneiform Bilingual Royal Inscriptions" attempts to account for the existence of Mesopotamian bilingual texts outside the realms of scribal tradition and education. He traces the gradual replacement of Sumerian by Akkadian and provides an invaluable outline of the corpora of Sumerian-Akkadian, Akkadian-Elamite, Akkadian-Hittite, Assyrian-Urartean, Assyrian-Aramaic, and Achaemenid bilingual inscriptions. Two of Galter's more interesting observations are that with only one exception (the Topzaweh stele) "bilinguals either marked the beginning or the end of a period of language contact," and that "prestige-endowing functions seem to have been more important than communication in the choice of language" (p. 44). The latter tells us much about the Mesopotamians' consciousness of speech and the cultural power of symbols.

From here the reader moves to Barbara Nevling Porter's investigation of the ideological message and the intended audiences of three public inscriptions of Esarhaddon (r. 681–669 B.C.E.): a stone stela from the outer gate of Sam'al, the Babylonian "A" prism, and the Babylonian "N" brick inscription. Based on the physical and linguistic accessibility of these texts, and each of them is very different in these respects, Porter demonstrates how the inscriptions' choice of language helps us to determine the audience. After examining them in detail, she avers that each makes a clear but different statement:

. . . in the Sam'al inscription, a statement of dominance; in the Babylonian building inscription, a statement of respect and a desire to acknowledge traditions shared with a conquered nation; in the Babylon brick inscription, an even stronger statement of respect for that native tradition, even at the expense of the traditions of the conqueror. [p. 69]

Benjamin Hary continues the volume with "Judeo-Arabic in Its Sociolinguistic Setting" in which he uses

the cultural framework to examine the notions of multiglossia and language continuum in Judeo-Arabic with its different varieties, and to demonstrate, as a case study, the connection between translator and cultural identity in the Judeo-Arabic genre of the *šarḥ*. [p. 73]

The *šarḥ* is a "literal translation of Hebrew religious sacred texts into Judeo-Arabic . . ." (p. 73). After establishing the placement of the varieties of Arabic, including Judeo-Arabic, on a language continuum, Hary delineates several syntactic and lexical features in various *šarūḥ* that show interference from Hebrew. Hary finds that "Judeo-Arabic

operates in a Jewish society under a particular linguistic tension . . ." (p. 82) and concludes: "The pressing need of the authors of the *šarḥ* for verbatim translation of the Hebrew may demonstrate a strong desire to forge a connection with a Jewish heritage in a non-Jewish environment through its sacred texts" (pp. 94–95).

Shlomo Izre'el turns his attention to the Amarna tablets (mid-fourteenth century B.C.E.) and studies the Amarna glosses in conjunction with scribal education and the messenger system. Izre'el's careful examination illustrates how certain of the glosses establish that a particular author considered the language he was writing to be his native tongue. Izre'el's fascinating case study of tablet EA 369 suggests that the scribe who was to read the letter to the king was also the author of the letter. These observations, of course, have profound implications for our conception of ancient Syro-Canaanite literacy and the messenger system, for we can no longer accept the simplistic portrayal of illiterate messengers sent with letters to Egypt. They may have been, in fact, messenger-scribes.

Concluding this first section is a discussion of Hittite literature by Itamar Singer, who challenges the "almost axiomatic postulate of Mesopotamian origins for any cuneiform literary text" (p. 126 n. 16). Specifically, Singer questions whether literary texts written in Hittite could not in fact have been composed in Hattic. His argument is based on the "Tales about the City of Zalpa," the "Appu Myth," the "Tale of the Fisherman," and "The Hymn to Ishtar" (CTH 717), each of which, according to Singer, when studied closely, cannot be said to be of Hurrian or Mesopotamian origin. Singer does not suggest that Hittite literature owes no debt to these cultural influences, but only "that the issue not be approached uncritically and that a finer differentiation should be made between translated literature, free adaptations of foreign motifs, and original Hittite compositions with 'foreign flavor'" (p. 128).

The next section of five articles explores "Cultural Dispositions for Linguistic Choice." It begins with Muhammad Hasan Amara's "Arabic Diglossia in the Classroom: Assumptions and Reality," in which he probes the "sociolinguistic aspects of actual diglossia of the spoken varieties of Arabic inside the classroom in Israeli-Arab contexts . . ." (p. 132). Based on data culled from three Israeli Arab schools, Amara observes that in addition to Standard Arabic, the spoken local dialect and the educated spoken variety also are employed in the Arab schools despite their substantial differences in syntax, phonology, and lexicon. Amara concludes:

The classroom selection among the three spoken varieties depends on a number of variables: the subject of the class, the role and sex of the speaker, sensitivity to the appropriateness of the variety for a particular topic, and the language of the textbooks used. [p. 139]

From here, the volume moves to "*Fuṣḥā* within Dramatic Dialogue Written in the Colloquial," by Gabriel M. Rosenbaum. This study primarily focuses on

the integration of *Fuṣḥā* [the literary dialect] into dramatic dialogues written in 'Ammiyya (colloquial), after the *Fuṣḥā* lost its central position in the system of drama, and with the specific functions given to it in texts written in 'Ammiyya. [p. 144]

Rosenbaum also offers general insights for the interdisciplinary study of the literary use of colloquial dialects. For example, Rosenbaum observes that in a drama by Yūsuf Idrīs, British soldiers speak *Fuṣḥā*, "the assumption being that *Fuṣḥā* stands for English" (p. 152). One wonders if there are not corollaries to this in other, more ancient literary portrayals of foreigners, e.g., the biblical portrayal of the Philistines whose direct speech is

cast in biblical Hebrew.

Having mentioned the Hebrew Bible, it is fitting that we move next to Gary A. Rendsburg's "Linguistic Variation and the 'Foreign' Factor in the Hebrew Bible," which outlines the linguistic evidence for style and addressee switching in the direct discourse of foreigners in Canaan, of foreigners outside of Canaan, and in the prophetic oracles directed at foreign lands. For respective examples of each, Rendsburg selects the book of Job, the traditions of Balaam, and the prophetic addresses of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. He cites a blending of sociocultural and theological factors as responsible for the "foreign" factor: "The Israelites were so aware of their distinctiveness, especially in the realms of society and religion, that all efforts were made to mark the foreignness of non-Israelites" (p. 189). In the prophetic addresses, the theological factor is more prevalent, since the audience of these oracles was not foreigners but Israelites. Thus, when the audience caught the allusions to the dialect of the addressee nation, in Rendsburg's words, the response was "indeed Yahweh does address these people, for see, He speaks to them in their own language" (p. 190).

Orly Goldwasser's "On the Conception of the Poetic Form—a Love Letter to a Departed Wife: Ostrakon Louvre 698," investigates a letter of one Butehamun, an Egyptian scribe, to his deceased wife Ikhtay. This ostrakon is unique in that it partially is written as a literary text, and thus employs a use of "language registers normally outside the sphere of 'written as if spoken' language" (p. 199). Typically, the Egyptian genre of letters to the dead does not "contain verse-points and their subjects, grammar and lexis, are shared by 'regular' non-literary texts" (p. 199). After a careful study of the language employed in the letter, Goldwasser concludes that the text offers "a rare view of a moment when the boundaries of genre were extended not for mere administrative or political purposes, but in order to serve the most human of needs" (p. 200).

Shlomit Shraybom-Shivtiel rounds out this section with "The Role of the Colloquial in the Renaissance of Standard Arabic: Language as a Mirror of Social Change." By "renaissance" Shraybom-Shivtiel does not mean the revival of a dead language, but "the penetration of a language which had previously existed in written form exclusively into widespread areas of everyday social communication" (p. 207). Shraybom-Shivtiel's interest lies in how the *'Ammiyya* (colloquial variety) became the tool for common expression in electronic media, lectures, advertising, and discussions of technology. Focusing on the unsuccessful efforts of the Arabic Language Academy in Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s to minimize the status of colloquial Arabic in the face of a rising national status and a decreasing threat posed by the *'Ammiyya*, Shraybom-Shivtiel observes:

From the end of the 1950s onward, the Academy's position on the *'Ammiyya* actually underwent an about-face. The extensive penetration of the *'Ammiyya* into every aspect of cultural life, including science and literature, had become a reality and left no more room for efforts to block it. [p. 214]

"Neo-Aramaic and Kurdish: An Interdisciplinary Consideration of Their Influence on Each Other," by Michael L. Chyet, opens the third and final section of this book, titled "Cultural Contacts and Linguistic Interference." Here, Chyet discusses the linguistic evidence for mutual borrowing among enemy peoples. The paper is exploratory in that it traces historical scenarios favorable to conditions involving "languages in contact," while endeavoring to include data for all speech communities of the neo-Aramaic dialects in question, both Christian and Jewish (p. 223). After collecting and analyzing a wealth of highly detailed linguistic, and more innovatively, folkloristic data, Chyet demonstrates that the mutual linguistic influence between the neo-Aramaic dialects and Kurdish, among other Near Eastern languages, was indeed substantial, with the neo-Aramaic dialects incurring the most linguistic sway. Chyet's study demonstrates the utility of

interdisciplinary research and the benefits of recognizing the "mutual importance of the fields of history and linguistics" (p. 249).

Next Baruch Podolsky reflects upon "Mass Immigration and Its Possible Impact on the Linguistic Situation in Israel." Taking as his informants Russian immigrants to Israel who have resided there from two to twenty years, Podolsky explores a number of phonological, syntactic, and lexical changes both in Israeli Hebrew and, to a lesser extent, in Russian. Interestingly, he posits that, due to the "ever-growing number of non-native speakers (of modern Hebrew) on the one hand and a strong impact of the media on the other, we witness both a creolization and its reversal" (p. 262). Podolsky laments the growing gap between the rich literary Hebrew and the poor vernacular that characterizes Israel's demographic situation and concludes that "It may be indicative of some future developments in the Hebrew language" (p. 262).

Saul Levin concludes the book by considering "Greek as the Superstrate Written Language of Jews and Other Semitic Populations." After setting the historical stage for the impact of Hellenism in the Levant, Levin argues that "when Greek spread in the wake of Alexander, it was not just the conqueror's language but manifestly *the most accessible written language* within the experience of the peoples of the former Persian empire" (p. 268). After offering a detailed analysis and proposing Hebrew words with Greek etymologies, Levin considers "how this superstrate language, impinged, less obviously, upon the writing of Hebrew and its Semitic relatives" (p. 271) by focusing on the development of diacritics in both Greek and Hebrew.

I have very little to offer by way of criticism of this work. One possible shortcoming is that, despite the huge chronological and geographical scope of this book, surprisingly there are no articles devoted to Sumerian. Such an article, especially on the Sumerian EME.SAL dialect, an idiolect that shows up in hymns, in laments, and often in the direct speech of women, would have complemented this volume nicely. Nevertheless, this criticism can in no way detract from the book's overall value. It is an important contribution to the subject and one that suggests numerous avenues for research, opens up the complexities of ancient and modern Near Eastern languages, and demonstrates the benefits of a broad, interdisciplinary approach.

**The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society.**

BRINTLEY MESSICK. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996. Pp. xii + 342. \$18.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Annemarie Schimmel, *Harvard University*

When I was asked to review a book with the somewhat enigmatic title, *The Calligraphic State*, I was not sure what to expect, and concentrated upon the term "calligraphic." But then I was confronted with a study of the legal and, in the widest sense of the word, political situation in the town of Ibb in the Yemenite highland—a book that offers a blend of, in the author's words, "local-level ethnography in a provincial town and textual analysis of works of Islamic jurisprudence" (p. 3). This combination yields quite interesting results, although perhaps a specialist in Islamic law might be better qualified than me to review this book.

Yet, even for a nonspecialist, it proves to be fascinating. The author, who has spent years in Ibb, has dealt with the material not only analytically or in terms of written sources, but also through discussion of the relevant problems with the people themselves. Thus, far from struggling one's way through a dry legal handbook, the reader enjoys reading a well-documented book, which also contains some interesting photographs of people and writings.