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**Book review:**

**Saenz-Badillos, Angel. *A History of the Hebrew Language*. Cambridge, 1993.**

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# A History of the Hebrew Language

Angel Sáenz-Badillos

Translated by John Elwolde

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 371 pages. \$39.95 (LC 93-20367; ISBN 0-521-43157-3).

Review by  
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It is with great pleasure that scholars and students of Hebrew should welcome the appearance of Angel Sáenz-Badillos' *A History of the Hebrew Language*. The work, originally published in Spanish as *Historia de la lengua hebrea*, now makes accessible to a larger audience the most complete history of the Hebrew language to date. Previous modern works on the topic pale in scope and breadth. Either they limit their discussion to shorter periods, as is the case with M. Hadas-Lebel's *Histoire de la langue hébraïque, des origines à l'époque de la Mishna*, or they treat the subject in only a cursory manner, as do Y. Kutscher's *A History of the Hebrew Language* and C. Rabin's *A Short History of the Hebrew Language*. Consequently, the continuity of the language represented in Sáenz-Badillos' up-to-date and exhaustive analysis adds significantly to the important contributions of scholars prior.

The author demonstrates his mastery of the colossal topic by providing accurate and detailed information on the Hebrew language within the social and linguistic contexts of its various historical periods. Thus, Hebrew is discussed in relation both to linguistic



stages, e.g., Proto-Semitic and Northwest Semitic, and to historical periods, e.g., the Pre- and Post-exilic periods, Rabbinic period, Medieval period, and the modern era. Sáenz-Badillos takes great pains to illustrate the lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactical idiosyncrasies of the historical periods in question. Rich with examples, this book serves the author's original intention as a university handbook extremely well. Beginners of Hebrew and non-Hebraists, however, might find this book a bit difficult because its language is meant for the specialist and advanced student. The words apophony, anatyptic, and laryngeal, for example, are dropped with little or no explanation. (In this regard, a glossary of terms to facilitate the uninitiated might have proven helpful, as would an index of Hebrew words for the specialist.)

One of the greatest strengths of this book is the author's treatment of Hebrew in the Rabbinic and Medieval periods. No other work comes close in detailing the linguistic features of these periods and the intervening periods of development. In the chapter on the Medieval period, for example, Sáenz-Badillos discusses not only the language of the Palestinian *paytanim* in relation to biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, but also the idiolectal traits of Saadia Gaon, the Ibn Tibbon family, Menahum b. Saruq, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, and other Spanish writers, and the Hebrew writers of Italy and Central Europe.

Also impressive is the space given in each chapter to the history of research and the classification of Hebrew according to its period, which doubtless will serve scholars and students alike as a useful teaching and research tool. Equally impressive is the book's nearly exhaustive bibliography which is an accomplishment in its own right and a testament to Sáenz-Badillos' learning. The book is well organized and clearly written, though the often list-like prosaic style in which the subject is presented tends to bear heavily upon the reader at times.

Sáenz-Badillos' well-documented analysis is even-handed, providing opposing views on scholarly issues still in debate, e.g., whether biblical Hebrew is a *Mischsprache* or a homogeneous linguistic system, and whether certain phonemes (e.g., /h/ and /h̄/, /g/ and /ʕ/) were preserved in the spoken language of the post-exilic periods. I perceived a bias only in the discussion on the origin of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Though I personally agree with Sáenz-Badillos that the scrolls are the product of the Qumran-dwellers (probably the Essenes), the verdict is still out, and a Jerusalemite, and perhaps even Pharisaic origin (though doubtful) cannot be ruled out



entirely.

The overwhelming positive aspects of this work notwithstanding, several critical comments, most of which are minor, seem warranted. Perhaps the most important drawback of the book is its tendency to develop diachronically at the expense of equally important synchronic lines. This is especially noticeable in the treatment of earlier periods in which Sáenz-Badillos makes no distinction between poetry and prose, much less between genres, e.g., laments, prayers, dialogues. That the author distinguishes between poetry and prose when discussing the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls (p. 131) and the Hebrew used in Medieval Spain (pp. 219, 245) makes the omission all the more glaring.

In this regard one also notes a lack of discussion concerning the northern and southern dialectal distinctions of biblical Hebrew which have come to light in recent years. (See, e.g., C. Rabin's "Leshonam shel `Amos ve-Hoshea`" and G. A. Rendsburg's *Linguistic Evidence*.) Sáenz-Badillos, at one point, does mention that several biblical books probably contain non-normative dialects, e.g., *Job* (p. 114, n. 6), but only in passing. Such important aspects of Hebrew in the biblical period should find greater representation in a work as accomplished as this. This oversight leads the author to conclude that double plural constructions (e.g., *hārāsē 'ešim*) represent only a later usage (p. 118), though, in fact, they also are northernisms. (Cf., C. H. Gordon, "North Israelite Influence" and E. Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, p. 85.)

Similarly, one finds a lack of treatment of the subject of diglossia, or colloquialisms, in biblical Hebrew. Though the author mentions the possible existence of colloquialisms (p. 114) in reference to idioms, much progress has been made on this subject and abundant linguistic evidence could have been provided. Thus, G. A. Rendsburg's, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew* should have been noted, if not discussed at length.

Another feature of this book which I find problematic occurs in the sections dealing with biblical Hebrew. Here one finds words containing the phoneme /h/ written with /h/. Similarly confused are the phonemes /t/ and /š/, /g/ and /ʔ/; and /s/ and /z/, all of which should be kept distinct. Though numerous examples could be given, I will cite but a few: *šulhan* (p. 36) should be written (*tulhan*) and *maḥaṣ* and *haemaer* (p. 60) should be written *maḥaṣ* and *haemaer* respectively. These transcriptions are unjustifiable in the light of the known Ugaritic cognates, the preceding chart which distinguishes the consonantal phonemes of Proto-Semitic (p. 19), and the author's



discussion of the possible preservation of these phonemes in post-exilic times (p. 69).

My remaining remarks are brief. To the theories concerning the classification of the language of the Deir 'Allā inscription (p. 37, n. 38), we now can add another; namely, that the dialect is representative of northern Hebrew. (See, e.g., G. A. Rendsburg, "The Dialect of the Deir 'Alla Inscription.")

On p. 73, when discussing the tendency to recognize verbal conjugations in the Hebrew Bible unknown to the Masoretes, a footnote should have been made to the possible existence of a *Tafel* form (à la *targēm*) in Hosea 11:3 (i.e., *tirgāltî*).

On p. 232, the poetic use of identical lexemes with different meanings, which the author sees as a feature of Medieval Hebrew style, is more commonly found in biblical Hebrew and is known as antanaclasis. (See, e.g., the works of A. R. Ceresko and J. Sasson.)

Finally, though the translation from the Spanish is mostly clear and concise, I noted two typos which have crept into the translation: "most *piyyuṭ* uses features" (p. 210) should read "most *piyyuṭ* use features" and "become masculines" (p. 258) should read "become masculine."

These criticisms should not deter serious students of Hebrew from purchasing this book. It is a welcome addition to the studies on the history of the Hebrew language which precede it and the most comprehensive work of its kind to date. As such it conveys the cultural and linguistic continuity of Hebrew throughout its three-thousand year history. Professor Angel Sáenz-Badillos should be applauded for making accessible in a most readable fashion his incredible knowledge of Hebrew.

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## Islam and the West

Norman Daniel

Oxford: Oneworld Publications Ltd., 1993.  
 467 pages. \$33.95 (ISBN 1-85168-043-8).

Review by  
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To understand fully the relationship between Islam and Christianity in the Middle East, we must look at a large canvass—that of the entire Islamic world and the West. In his book *Islam and the West*, Norman Daniel presents a work, which, besides being authoritative, is highly interesting reading throughout. He has done such a comprehensive job that one is tempted to say that anyone who wants to study Islam and Christianity, must read *Islam and the West*. His work is a gold mine of theory.

Norman Daniel had a long Middle East career. He was consultant to Hassan Khalifa; he was a historian of the Middle Ages and of inter cultural relations. Most of the works he wrote are about Middle East and Islamic affairs. Two of his other titles include *Islam: Past Influence and Future Challenge* and *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe*.<sup>1</sup> His magnum opus reflects his immense experience in Islamic studies.

J. Kritzeck remarked that *Islam and the West* is "now the indispensable work on the subject," and indeed it is. Professor Daniel's magisterial historical analysis gives us the opportunity to