

**Languages from the world of the Bible**, by Holger Gzella (ed.). Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 2012. Xvi + 256 pp. Hardbound. 80 EUR. ISBN 978-1-934078-61-7.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25159/1013-8471/3685>

The present volume is the English translation of *Sprachen aus der Welt des Alten Testaments* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009, 2nd ed. 2010). For the translation the German version has been updated and thoroughly revised. In the preface Gzella notes on the importance of the languages addressed:

The alphabetic script unites the languages of Syria-Palestine, Arabia, Persia and Greece. Their investigation belongs to various academic fields but often does not surface, at least not at a regular rate, in university curricula. Among the plethora of current methods and research interests in biblical exegesis and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, philology no longer occupies the principal place. Nonetheless, a thorough knowledge of the primary sources in their original forms remains the most important point of departure for all further concerns (vi).

This collection of contributions by international specialists provides concise up-to-date overviews of the common varieties of the languages of the world of the Bible without merely repeating what has been said elsewhere (vi). The essays also include discussion of the interaction of these languages within a clear historical framework.

H. Gzella notes in the “Introduction” (1–13):

During its genesis over about a thousand years, the Hebrew Bible has always been part of a multilingual world. Already in the second millennium BCE, centuries before the earliest direct attestations of Hebrew, several languages were regularly in use in Syria-Palestine: besides local forms of Akkadian, which belongs to the Semitic family and was chiefly employed for international correspondence and administration, scribes also wrote, depending on the purpose, Hurrian, Hittite, and, less frequently, Egyptian. The dominant script was Mesopotamian syllabic cuneiform. While these

idioms were not mutually intelligible, structurally very different, and members of distinct language families, they left at least some traces, such as individual loanwords, in the lexicon of the various Semitic tongues which dominated the region thereafter (1).

He further discusses the interdependence and development of these languages. The remaining essays are: A. Millard, “The Alphabet” (14–27); A. Gianto, “Ugaritic” (28–54); H. Gzella, “Phoenician” (55–75) and “Ancient Hebrew” (76–110); K. Beyer, “The Languages of Transjordan” (111–127); M. Folmer, “Old and Imperial Aramaic” (128–159); R. Hasselbach, “Old South Arabian” (160–193); M. de Vaan, A. Lubotsky, “Old Persian” (194–208) and A. Willi, “Greek” (209–241).

The volume closes with tables of West Semitic and Greek letterforms, two black and white maps and an index. In the preface, the editor explains the selection in the volume. The cuneiform languages have been excluded. The volume does not contain a modern survey of Akkadian, nor are the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian varieties of Akkadian included. Neither are there essays on Ancient North Arabic, Egyptian and some later varieties of Hebrew and Aramaic (viii).

Recent volumes with a similar scope are J. Kaltner, S. McKenzie (eds.), *Beyond Babel: A handbook for Biblical Hebrew and related languages* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) and R. D. Woodland’s (ed.), *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the world’s ancient languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004). The new *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its reception*, edited by H.-J. Klauck, B. McGinn, P. Mendes-Flohr, C.-L. Seow, H. Spieckermann, B. Dov Walfish und E. Ziolkowski (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2009f.) also contains up-to-date entries on the languages of the world of the Bible; e.g. M. Luukko, “Akkadian Language”, *EBR 1*, 698–701; J. Hämeen-Anttila, “Arabic Language”, *EBR 2*, 592f.; I. Kottsieper, “Aramaic Language”, *EBR 2*, 625–629.

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