

deviant contemporary viewpoints. The book's bibliography is somewhat dated, but that is a rather small quibble to make concerning a text that may be highly recommended in just about every other respect.

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Pérez Fernández, Miguel. *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*. Trans. John Elwolde. Leiden: Brill, 1997. xxii + 327 pp. Paperback, \$130.00.

A knowledge of rabbinic Hebrew (RH) is a great asset, a logical next step after mastery of biblical Hebrew (BH). It affords an understanding of development in the language. It exposes one to the impact of Aramaic, Greek, and Latin on the Hebrew language and is an entrance into rabbinic culture: both its world in general, and the rabbinic mind in particular. The best translation is no substitute for reading the original: what was said and how it was said, including formulaic expressions as well as the various nuances.

In reality, classes are usually difficult to come by, since the "step" to RH turns out to be more of a gulf or chasm. Until now the only available resource has been Segal's *Mishnaic Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, 1927). However, this is a reference work not adapted or adaptable to progressive learning. Fernández's volume is a conscious sequel to Segal, interacting with and updating his work to current scholarship. *Inter alia*, a major difference between the two is Fernández's decision to base his book on actual manuscripts, especially Codex Kaufmann, rather than on printed editions as Segal had done.

A vast amount of material could come under the purview of such a book, extending all the way down to medieval commentators such as Rashi and Sforno. Since RH continued to develop over time in terms of both what was said and how it was said (syntax, morphology, and vocabulary), wisely Fernández has chosen to confine himself to the Tannaitic literature (first and second centuries C.E.) against the background of BH, and especially late biblical Hebrew (LBH), where RH forms are either present or in early development.

Following the Introduction, which is a valuable resource both in its own right and as a prelude to the rest of the work, the book is arranged topically in four major divisions dealing with nouns (including pronouns and adjectives), verbs, particles (prepositions, conjunctions, and adverbs), and clauses. It is not the typical teaching grammar that cycles among the various parts of speech as successively more difficult issues are addressed. Each of the four major divisions is divided into units (thirty-two total); that cover texts in sections dealing with morphology (including diachronic issues), grammar and usage, phraseology, vocabulary, and exercises.

The introductory text of each unit is selected to illustrate typical word and thought patterns, and then the reader is walked through issues such as hermeneutics, special vocabulary, concepts, and phraseology. More than BH, RH is a stylized, idiomatic, terse language. So Fernández includes not only RH, but also rabbinic thought.

The Morphology sections introduce the topics pertaining to the units, such as nouns, interrogatives, and prepositions. Where relevant, RH, LBH, and BH

forms are compared and contrasted. Following are Grammar and Usage sections. While these are time-consuming for the reader, they contain a wealth of information that warrants close attention. Ideally the Grammar would be used in a graduate class. Those working alone will need to pay close attention to this section of each unit.

The Phraseology section shows how quite innocuous expressions are often fraught with profound, even if obtuse significance so that the sum is greater than the total of the individual parts.

Because the Vocabulary section is incomplete, it is frustrating to attempt the exercises, which assume an almost encyclopedic knowledge of BH vocabulary. Each assignment has twenty exercises, including ten each of vocalized and unvocalized extracts, drawn from sources such as the *Mishnah* (especially *Pirque Aboth*), *Sifra*, *Sifre*, and *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*. The latter set gives an ambitious student the opportunity both to read unvocalized texts and to vocalize them if desired, an excellent way to test one's RH skills.

The volume concludes with a bibliography and four indices: biblical and nonbiblical texts cited, Hebrew and Aramaic forms (these would be more useful if the Hebrew and Aramaic were right-justified), types of verbal roots, and forms of the paradigm verb.

Overall, the book is well done and is a pleasure to use. It is gratifying to find a book written in another language that is translated so well, though this is becoming the hallmark of Elwolde's work. The volume is well printed, with a few Hebrew pointing errors and inaccuracies. For the autodidact, a teachers' help/supplement would be a great boon. I found it helpful to have handy a copy of Jastrow (*A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature*), Alcalay (*The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary*), Danby (*The Mishnah*), and Neusner (*The Mishnah* [available on computer]). These sources help with word meanings and usage, and provide the opportunity to check one's translation.

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Pfifzner, Victor C. *Hebrews*. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. 218 pp. Paperback, \$21.00.

The purpose of the Abingdon New Testament Commentaries is to provide "compact, critical commentaries . . . written with special attention to the needs and interests of theological students . . . as well as for pastors and other church leaders" (11). In this volume on Hebrews, Victor C. Pfifzner, Professor of New Testament and Principal of Luther Seminary in North Adelaide, South Australia, has done just that. In only 218 pages, Pfifzner has provided a masterfully concise and eminently readable commentary on a very challenging biblical book.

The commentary begins with twenty-five pages of introductory material dealing with the literary genre, rhetorical devices, structural, and theological issues associated with Hebrews as well as the typical issues associated with authorship. Pfifzner maintains that Hebrews is best understood as a "call to worship" (43) written no later than 64 C.E. by an unknown author to a group of wavering believers living in Rome.