

Jethro (pp. 71–74), the “frame-busting” in the story of David and Michal in 2 Samuel 6 (pp. 80–91), and the social triangle story of David, Nabal, and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 (pp. 91–98).

Chapter 4, “Dialogue as a Social Kaleidoscope: Using Positioning Theory,” examines dialogue in public space with an analysis of the “modes of positioning” in Daniel 1, 3, and 6 (pp. 108–14) and an exegesis of the confrontation between King Ahab and the prophet Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 (pp. 114–29). In chapter 5, which deals with “spatiality and context,” the author discusses the “importance of spatial context as a creative and cognitive factor in the development of social interaction and effective storytelling.” He illustrates this in what he calls “Jeremiah, the Written Word, and Linked Zones of Communication” (pp. 151–63). The volume concludes with a helpful glossary of technical terms.

The purpose of this book is, according to the author, “to introduce readers briefly to the various critical communication theories” and to help them “step more effectively into the world of ancient Israelite conversations” (p. viii). This aim is reasonably well accomplished.

Such modern critical approaches to the conversations in the Bible are promising methodologically, especially because Biblical exegesis tends to concentrate on the text only, in particular from a semiotic perspective. This book takes into consideration the social aspects of the linguistic phenomena. Like cognitive linguistics and discourse analysis, this type of exegesis emphasizes the relationship between language and the real world. This emphasis certainly directs modern exegetes of ancient texts to a more realistic and concrete way of approaching multidimensional experiences such as conversations.

However, when one applies any communication theory based on the spoken language to the analysis of written texts, which usually present no prosodic information about how the actual conversation was carried on, one must be extra careful not to impose the modern reader’s interpretation without first learning the culture of the original context. Though the author, an expert on ancient Near Eastern culture, is well familiar with ancient manners and customs from the time of the Bible, the fact remains that many cultural matters, including some aspects of language and grammar, are still unfamiliar to modern readers, so they cannot always use his methods successfully. Furthermore, interpretation of archaeological artifacts as well as ancient written texts is often elusive, so conclusions can often be only tentative.

The location of conversations is certainly crucial for the proper understanding of a story. For example, with regard to the situation of Tamar, the author comments speculatively: “No woman other than a prostitute would be sitting beside a road, unescorted by a male, unless she was in distress . . .” (p. 45). Although the location where she was sitting is certainly significant to the situation, he does not seem to have examined what the text says about it. In v. 14 the narrator seems to be saying

that Enaim is by the Timnah road (*‘al-derek Timnāṭāh*) and Tamar was sitting “at the entrance of Enaim” (*bəpetāḥ ‘ēnayim*). However, the author’s explanation that “Judah . . . encountered Tamar beside the road on his return home” gives the impression that he met her in the countryside rather than in or near the city. Thus, intra-linguistic context (grammar and discourse) should be first understood well before one proceeds to the analysis of external socio-cultural, extra-linguistic context.

Again, written dialogues do not necessarily reflect the actual conversations of spoken language. Without prosodic information such as tone, stress, tempo, and silence, how can we reconstruct the spoken dialogues? A narrator’s purpose is not to present the real conversation; embedded dialogues in a narrative are not written to reproduce the phonic reality. Therefore, extra caution should be taken when we analyze such dialogues according to a modern theory of communication based on spoken languages.

Having said this, we recognize that the author has done a great service for biblical exegetes by directing them to pay closer attention to the social and cultural background and context of where the actual conversations in the story might have taken place. One might notice for example why a speaker is somewhat hesitant to respond to his partner in a dialogue: for instance, Saul in 1 Sam. 15:20 and the Amalekite soldier in 2 Sam. 1:4. In response to a straightforward question both begin their answer with “Because . . .” (*‘āšer*) and then appear to make an excuse.

This is certainly a useful book which introduces critical methods for analyzing Old Testament conversations in a balanced way. Any biblical exegete or translator should take into consideration the fact that the conversations have their own socio-cultural context and that modern methods from “sociology, critical geography, socio-linguistics, and social psychology,” properly controlled, are useful and should be applied to better understand ancient biblical texts. I recommend this book to any serious exegete of the Bible.

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Douch II: La végétation antique—Une approche macrobotanique. By HALA NAYEL BARRAKAT and NATHALIE BAUM. Documents de Fouilles de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, vol. 27. CAIRO: INSTITUT FRANÇAIS D’ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE DU CAIRE, 1992. Pp. x + 105.

The necropolis of Dush, ancient Kysis, a Roman and Byzantine settlement in the southernmost part of el-Khârga Oasis, has been excavated by a team of the IFAO in Cairo since 1981, after an initial investigation

in 1978. The town itself, which was occupied from the middle of the first to the beginning of the fifth century A.D., was an administrative center situated at an important crossroads of various caravan routes, especially the east-west route leading via the Dush Pass to Esna and Edfu in the Nile Valley. For this reason the town was fortified and guarded by Roman garrisons; it was in fact a military stronghold on the western frontier of Roman Egypt. The town housed an estimated five thousand inhabitants, most of whom led an agricultural existence. So far, ninety-five tombs have been uncovered in various parts of the necropolis; they belong to two main types, one with a sloping passage with or without stairs, leading to one or more rock-cut, or occasionally vaulted, mud-brick chambers, the other consisting of a pit dug vertically into the bedrock and giving access to one or two underground chambers. The remains of some seven hundred individuals have been found in these tombs. Judging by their burial customs, which included mummification, they adhered to traditional Egyptian beliefs; no archaeological evidence has yet been found at Dush for the advent of Christianity, which in this period became the dominant religion in the Nile Valley (cf. M. Reddé et al., "Quinze années de recherches françaises à Douch: vers un premier bilan," *BIFAO* 90 [1990]: 281–301).

The majority of the plant remains which form the subject of the present book derive from twelve tombs excavated in 1982; a further ten tombs found in 1990 provide additional material. The book is, in effect, a supplement to the excavation report on the necropolis published simultaneously (F. Dunand, J.-L. Heim, N. Henein, R. Lichtenberg, *Douch I: La nécropole – Exploration archéologique. Monographie des tombes I à 72* [Cairo: IFAO, 1992]). It provides hardly any background information about the archaeological context of the plant finds. The book clearly addresses itself to Egyptologists with a limited botanical knowledge; palaeobotanists will find much of the purely botanical information superfluous.

The introduction briefly outlines the ecological setting of the site and its present-day vegetation. In the chapters that follow the botanical remains are listed and analyzed. They were collected from the sand that filled the chambers and from the floors, as well as from pottery containers and baskets, and from under or on mummified bodies. No reservations are expressed concerning the date of the plant remains found in the wind-blown sandfill. Most, if not all, of the tombs were robbed more than once, a practice which continued until at least the end of the nineteenth century (*Douch* I, 6). Some of this material may therefore have been introduced by the wind or by burrowing animals at a much later date than the original burials.

The thirty-one samples collected in the 1982 season consisted of leaves, flowers, fruits, nuts, and grains; they were found either loose or bound together into

seven different types of wreaths and bouquets, a total of thirty-five of which were recovered. The material found in 1990 mainly consists of bouquets; one tomb, though, contained only some two hundred figs. The bouquets included fragrant herbs like rosemary, marjoram, and thyme as well as branches of acacia, apple, olive, vine, pomegranate, chrysanthemum, myrtle, flax, wheat, and barley. Fruits were also found, including (seeds of) date, melon, olive, and grape. Samples of the mummy bandages were also analyzed; invariably they proved to be linen—cotton was completely absent, although it was certainly known in Roman Egypt.

The second part of the book describes the individual plants, arranged alphabetically by family. The occurrence and history of each plant are treated briefly, including its various names in Egyptian, Coptic, Greek, etc.; most of the information is derived from other well-known sources (on p. 35 read D[elwen] Samuel for S[amuel] Delwen), and this applies also to the illustrations, which unfortunately have not been provided with a scale.

The final chapter offers a synthesis of the material. The plant remains can be divided into four categories: cultivated plants, remnants of natural vegetation in or near cultivated land, ruderal (i.e., nitrogen-demanding) weeds, and desert plants. The uses of some forty plants are described and set out in various diagrams (food, medicine, oils, fibers, etc.). Their origin and dispersal centers are also discussed at some length. Here the authors divide the material into geobotanical groups, using terms such as "*élément irano-touranienne*." Such a grouping exceeds the age of the finds by at least a hundred times and is not very helpful from a practical point of view; the archaeologist is much better informed when a more recent origin is given. *Hordeum* and *Triticum*, for instance, derive from the Fertile Crescent of the Near East, not from an African diffusion centre. The same applies to the olive, which may have an early tropical origin, but which was certainly developed as an oil-producing fruit somewhere in the Mediterranean.

Finally, the historical context of the finds is discussed. A fair amount of the material was used in wreaths and bouquets in much the same way as was customary in Pharaonic Egypt, but the Hellenistic period reveals some significant changes in the composition of these bouquets, notably an increase in the use of branches of olive and vine and various fragrant species. A brief survey of plants introduced in Roman Egypt but not found at Dush concludes this chapter. Extensive indexes greatly enhance the usefulness of this welcome publication.

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