

A.A. Macintosh & C.L. Engle, 2014 *The T&T Clark Hebrew Primer*, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, ISBN 9780567456571 vii+82pp, £13 pb, (£44 hb) and ISBN 9780567197337, £13 ePDF.

Reviewed by Christopher J. Davey

From time to time my tutors at Cambridge would take me aside when dealing with a point of Hebrew and ask, 'how did Andrew teach you that?' While the grammar we used, A.B. Davidson's *An Introductory Hebrew Grammar* (revised edition Mauchline 1962, London: T&T Clark) may politely be described as awkward, Andrew Macintosh's teaching systems more than compensated for this and produced results that impressed his peers. Learning dead languages with limited literature, such as classical Hebrew, is problematic for most people, and once learnt how quickly they can be forgotten. This book aims to redress this situation.

Rev Dr Andrew Macintosh is Dean Emeritus of St John's College, Cambridge, UK where for over forty years he introduced students to Hebrew. During this time he developed numerous systems to help students learn efficiently and effectively remember the language. We are indebted to him and to Rev Dr Cynthia Engle, Adjunct Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, Houston, Texas, USA for co-authoring the book.

With formidable recommendations from Hugh Williamson, Regius Professor of Hebrew, Oxford 1992-2014, Robert Gordon, Regius Professor of Hebrew, Cambridge 1995-2012, and Emeritus Professor Emmanuel Tov, Hebrew University Jerusalem, nothing the present reviewer could write would conspicuously influence the book's standing. Williamson comments on the rapidity with which Hebrew can be forgotten, and Gordon believes that this book may serve as a 'DIY refresher course'; it is in this role that it will have lasting usefulness.

According to some, the book is 'a poor man's Gesenius Kautzsch', as it attempts to systematise the written language as it was used. It is not comprehensive, the use of the infinitive absolute and dual forms, for example, are not dealt with. The book aims to review what is 'absolutely essential' and to 'facilitate revision and consolidation' for students engaged in learning Hebrew and for those who 'wish to revive their knowledge of the language' (vii).

The first chapter covers the six categories (declensions) of 'nouns' and adjectives, the second deals with the strong verb, and weak verbs are discussed in the third. The last three chapters are comparatively short and discuss the definite article, *Waw*, and particles and prepositions.

One of the secrets of the Macintosh system was the recitation of grammatical forms; verbal systems are arranged in the book to facilitate chanting. When hearing about the

book, my first question was, whether it included a disc with Andrew's chants; I was told that one may follow. When reading the book the chants quickly returned to mind, but this does not help those who have not already been introduced to them. Some of Andrew's 'nicknames' for grammatical formula, such as the 'bottle form' for the active participle (18), are not included, maybe because they were deemed inappropriate. However, they were certainly very effective at the time and their inclusion in any revision should be considered.

A selected vocabulary is included. Andrew never let vocabulary pass without offering information and suggestions to aid the memory. Many of these ideas related to non-Semitic usage and have not been included in the book, but those indicating a 'connection in various aspects of Hebrew and Semitic context' have. Ultimately vocabulary must be retained through the regular reading of the text.

The paperback is attractively priced, but will suffer with regular handling. The main criticism of the hard copy production is that the font is a little too small, older people using the book to revive their knowledge of the language will struggle. Hebrew can be hard on the eyes, especially when focussing on the pointing as this book by necessity does.

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My second year of Hebrew at Cambridge involved the reading of unpointed Hebrew passages that illustrated the finer points of the written language. Today, just getting an unpointed Old Testament text is a challenge in itself. Maybe a second book could pick up these examples together with exercises that illustrate the points made in the *Primer*. Indeed, without testing oneself with assignments it is difficult to be sure that the material has been understood.

The T&T Clark Hebrew Primer provides an efficient way back for lapsed readers of Old Testament Hebrew. It is now not necessary to defer one's Hebrew revival to retirement when all those interesting and potentially time-consuming activities are to be tackled.

First time students will find this summary of the essential elements of Hebrew useful when revising. Some teachers may consider incorporating this text into their syllabus while others may even contemplate adopting some of the teaching patterns into their class presentations.