

## Book Reviews

*The World's Oldest Alphabet: Hebrew as the Language of the Proto-Consonantal Script.* By Douglas Petrovich, with a contribution by Sarah K. Doherty and introduction by Eugene H. Merrill. Jerusalem: Carta, 2016, xvi + 262 pp., \$84.00.

Douglas Petrovich has released a provocative and polarizing monograph concerning the world's oldest known alphabet. In 2017, Petrovich became the professor of biblical history and exegesis at The Bible Seminary in Katy, TX. Previously, he taught on ancient Egypt at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada. Petrovich and I work together in the excavation of Shiloh conducted by the Associates for Biblical Research.

Scholars tend to agree that the earliest attested alphabet belongs to the family of Semitic languages. They disagree, however, on the identity of that language. In this volume, Petrovich sets out to prove the language of the first alphabet was Hebrew—not Canaanite, Phoenician, or Ugaritic. (Hubert Grimme proposed the same thesis in his 1923 publication.) Petrovich updates the scholarship on the topic, offers solutions to the identity of the debated alphabetic letters, and generates better drawings in order to improve decipherment. To accomplish his goal, the author amasses an incredible amount of research from a vast range of disciplines.

The book targets an academic audience, although the author even hopes to reach “the non-specialist with no formal knowledge of Hebrew, ME [Middle Egyptian], or syllabics” (p. 12). For a popular summary of the book, the reader can view Petrovich's article, “Hebrew as the Language behind the World's First Alphabet?,” posted on the ASOR blog, *Ancient Near East Today*, in April of 2017 (<http://asorblog.org/2017/04/10/hebrew-language-behind-worlds-first-alphabet>).

After an introduction by Eugene Merrill, the volume presents four chapters: (1) “Background Matters to the Proto-Consonantal Inscriptions”; (2) “The Inscriptions of the Period of Egypt's Middle Kingdom”; (3) “The Inscriptions of the Period of Egypt's New Kingdom”; and (4) “Concluding Thoughts.” Petrovich created meticulous and attractive drawings of each inscription. The drawings use color coding and a reference system to facilitate comprehension. The back matter includes four appendixes, a list of abbreviations, a list of references, and a general index. Appendix 2 addresses “The Additional (Non-Original) Five Proto-Alphabetic Letters.” Appendix 3 features a word list for Middle Egyptian and the proto-consonantal script, and even includes conjectured words, such as נחלת and רמת (pp. 98, 232–33).

In his book, Petrovich treats sixteen inscriptions from four ...

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