

HEBREW

DONIACH, N. S., & A. KAHANE. (Eds.), in collaboration with The Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. *The Oxford English-Hebrew Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Pp. xxiii, 1091. \$65, cloth.

In the past few years there has been an upsurge of Hebrew-Hebrew dictionaries published in Israel, following a hiatus (defined as *hafsakah* 'pause,' *pa'ar* 'gap' in the dictionary under review) of some 30 years since the publication of the authoritative *Hamilton Hehadash* 'The New Dictionary' by Avraham Even-Shoshan, which has recently been reissued in a new and somewhat updated edition. The new dictionaries are *Milon Hahoveh* 'Dictionary of Contemporary Hebrew' by Shoshana Bahat and Mordechai Mishor (1995), *Milon Sapir* 'The Concise Sapphire Dictionary' edited by Eitan Avneyon (1997), and *Rav Milim* 'A Comprehensive Dictionary of Modern Hebrew' by Yaacov Choueka (1997).

These dictionaries present the state of the art (an expression that cannot be found in the dictionary under review) of contemporary Hebrew lexicography with their updated vocabulary based on contemporary usage and a new approach to verb presentation formed in present tense rather than the traditional past tense. The availability of these new dictionaries poses a challenge (well defined in our dictionary as *etgar*) for any bilingual dictionary. It is even more challenging because of the dynamic nature of modern, revitalized Hebrew that is now in the midst of a major transformation. This change began during the Hebrew Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) at the end of the 18th century when Hebrew was revived as a literary and secular language. Its resuscitation as a spoken language, continued at the end of the 19th century, is generally attributed to the efforts of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda.

In the Hebrew-English-Hebrew domain, the dated Reuben Alcalay's *The Complete English-Hebrew Dictionary* and its twin, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary* (my editions are from 1962 and 1965, respectively) are still useful tools that were somewhat supplemented by the Megiddo or *The New Bantam-Megiddo Hebrew & English Dictionary* of the 1970s, or by any of a number of word processor-related dictionaries. Also available is Shimshon Inbal's *Hebrew/American/English/Hebrew User-Friendly Dictionary* (1988). The Hebrew title boasts that it is the dictionary for the 2000s.

The work under review here is a concerted effort (properly defined in our dictionary as "cooperatively coordinated efforts" [my translation from the Hebrew]) of a group of well-known Israeli authors, among them Y. Kenaz, G. Telpaz, B. Tamuz, journalist-essayist Y. Bronowski, and linguist R. Sappan, some of whom are now deceased. These wordsmiths of Hebrew letters were invited to work on the dictionary at Oxford by the reputed Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies (under the leadership of David Patterson).

The typography in the dictionary is clear and legible, although the vocalization (*nekudot*) is not as clear as it could and should be, given the available bilingual computer and typesetting technology. In general, it is user-friendly (defined as: "[computer, etc.] adjusted to the user[,] easy to operate"). The Hebrew orthography is based on the rules of Israel's Academy of the Hebrew Language for fully vocalized Hebrew (*ketiv haser; nikud male*), which some of the cited Hebrew-Hebrew dictionaries are modifying to accommodate the non-vocalized Israeli Hebrew currently in use in literature and in the press. Since Hebrew is a consonantal language, the Oxford's full vocalization is the preferred use for international and educational purposes. It may assist some native-speaking Israelis, too, who have to guess the correct pronunciation of ambiguous-appearing words.

The English entries have phonetic transcriptions based on the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Although far from user-friendly, they are accurate and scholarly, including part of speech, definition, level of usage, and the Hebrew translation. Many of the entries have helpful examples in both languages. Although the publication date of the dictionary is 1996, one may assume that many of its entries were edited a few years prior to that date. Nevertheless, in most cases its usage seems current. However, in certain fields, such as technology (especially in computers) and science, newly coined words have been introduced into Hebrew more recently, and they are, regrettably, missing. Thus, a notebook computer is translated as the clumsy *mahshev nayad za'ir*, 'a small portable computer,' rather than the term now in use, *mahshev nisa*, 'carry-on computer.' Word processor is given as *me'abed tamlimim*, rather than the one-word *tamliman*, and it is followed by this awkwardly superfluous explanation: "A computerized device to writing and editing texts." The term "byte" is nowhere to be found, although "bit" does appear. Yet, "software" has been included

(*tochnah*, along with a clarification: “as different from hardware, *homrah*”).

In other areas, we find the dictionary quite satisfactorily updated. For “insight” there is the newly coined *tovanah*, which is in use, even though the Hebrew Academy rejected it in favor of *bonenut*. However, “integrity” is given as the old, venerated *yosher*, although in all honesty, the newly coined *yoshrah* defines the term better and distinguishes between “honesty” and “integrity.” For “literacy” there is the clumsy but useful *yedi'at kero uchtov*, ‘knowledge of reading and writing,’ instead of the attractive single-word *oryanut*. “Trademark” is still *siman mis'havi*, ‘a trade sign,’ rather than the updated *motag*, and “additive” is *tosefet*, ‘addition’ instead of the new *tosaf*.

While these terms are new additions to the language, other entries contain incomplete or even inaccurate explanations. The term “hiatus,” cited above, has the proper definition as *hafsakah*, ‘pause,’ and *pa'ar*, ‘gap,’ the latter of which is missing in Alcalay’s English-Hebrew dictionary. The second definition, referring to linguistics, says in Hebrew: “a meeting of two vowels.” It should, of course, be “a pause between two successive vowels.” Alcalay has it correct, as well as five additional options lacking in our dictionary.

Similarly, the term “a red herring” is explained in Hebrew as “a problem not connected to the matter at hand,” which misses its essence as “something (not necessarily a problem) used to confuse and divert attention” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*). Likewise, “seminary” is limited here mostly to Catholic institutes, and The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York may protest its exclusion. “Seminal” is “breakthrough, opening new horizons, of semen”; however, Alcalay has the more accurate translation—the metaphoric *ma-freh*, ‘inseminate,’ is missing here.

In all fairness (Hebrew definition the same *yosher* as above, and *haginut*, which is much better, despite the awkward example provided in our dictionary), scrutinizing other dictionaries may well yield similar results. In the final analysis, the *Oxford English-Hebrew Dictionary*, even though it may not be what its dust jacket proclaims, “a complete guide for contemporary language,” is an important comprehensive and practical lexical tool for the student of Hebrew. One hopes that with the current computer technology, it will be possible to update it soon and that its Hebrew-English companion will follow suit.

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