

translating the Bible in African languages and its general impact on church activity and life. Information that could be provided by United Bible Societies (UBS) and bodies such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is not taken into account. This, however, does not weaken the arguments of this chapter. For example, the author argues here that "to a large extent, the independent churches are the product of Bible translation and in their existence the Bible plays a great role" (p. 29), and that "the translation of the Bible into African languages has become largely an ecumenical undertaking" (p. 32), thus becoming a "point of convergence, a guide recognized and followed by both strands so that the Scriptures which played a role in separating Christians are also playing a role in bringing them closer to one another at many points" (p. 32). The author then discusses ways in which the Bible is used in preaching and how it is shaping African Christianity. He writes, for example: "The Bible is seen and used more and more by Africans as a weapon by which to reclaim part of that authority from these centres for the local regions of Africa . . . More and more Africans would rather listen first to the speaking from overseas centres, in matters that concern the life-and-death of the Church, the body of Christ in a given area" (p. 42). Thus for the author "The gospel, backed as it is by the Scriptures in local languages, is growing into African peoples and they are growing into it. They are domesticating it within their total milieu, both traditional and modern for the practical formation of African Christianity. However it is read and interpreted, the Bible is making indelible marks on the religious scene in Africa" (p. 44).

This is certainly an excellent book and very insightful at many points. It gives an overview of trends, some major personalities and some key themes coupled with a personal knowledge and experience of the events being described. Even though Professor Mbiti has been living outside Africa for some years now, he has remained in close touch with events there. This book is highly recommended for theologians, translators of the Bible, church leaders and the interested general readers.

ALOO MOJOLA

van der Woude, A. S. (ed.) **The World of the Bible: Bible Handbook I.** Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans; Exeter: Paternoster Press 1986; 400 pp., 155 illustrations (40 in colour), \$34.95/£34.95

Thompson, J. A., **Handbook of Life in Bible Times.** Leister, UK and Downers Grove, USA: Inter-Varsity Press. 384 pp., 258 illustrations (223 in colour).

Helps to our understanding the background of Bible times abound, and we are now in a period of up-dating with others promised (V. H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in Bible Times*). This is good for those wishing to use materials from the cultures of the ancient Middle East to broaden their understanding and interpretation of the Bible.

Van der Woude's volume is a translation from the Dutch edition of his *Bijbels Handboek, Deel 1*, 1981. It brings together six major essays covering the geography, archaeology, languages and writing systems of Bible lands; the text and

textual history of the Old and New Testaments, the history of the ancient Near East, and biblical institutions. It is marked by careful scholarship and is thus a good introduction to any of these subjects for readers of any class. The treatment, however, varies in scale, though throughout there is emphasis on Palestine and its peoples. Part I (pp. 1-48) focuses on the physical environment, climate, fauna and flora, 'human life' (mainly communications) and, for the New Testament only, on specific cities. With such a wide scope, peripheral regions are but briefly touched upon, and reference to a good Bible atlas is essential to breathe life into the bones of this geography.

Archaeology is the subject of part II (pp. 49-74) which stresses the problems, methods and history of Palestinian archaeology. The neighbouring regions which have brought much evidence on the Bible text are almost ignored. This is not the place to turn for archaeological detail. The writing systems and languages used throughout the biblical world are in part III (pp. 77-154), with the emphasis on Hebrew, Aramiac and Greek, and partial coverage of the rich Egyptian and Mesopotamian scripts and literature. These, with the notes on less well attested minor languages, will be useful for those without access to fuller descriptions. The sections on the text and its history (part IV, pp. 156-200, E. Tov and J. S. Sibinga) and the history of the Ancient Near East to Alexander the Great (part V, pp. 201-327, K. R. Veenhof) are masterly reviews and well worthy of separate publication in handy form. The history is continued to the second century AD (M. A. Beek).

The chapter on biblical institutions (Part VI, K. Boubos) is more restricted, and again ignores the contribution to be drawn from the areas outside Palestine. It covers only 35 selected topics of 'ordinary' and religious life (if ever they were so divisible) in the manner common in many Bible dictionaries. Many of these are exemplary digests of the biblical material (e.g. sabbath) and feature prime categories of life and experience, though without the detail which would enable a Bible translator to relate his own culture to the past. A weakness of this edition is that the additional bibliographies (there are no footnotes) have not been directed to those who read English so much as German and Dutch.

Thompson's book is more profusely illustrated, and, though written in a more popular style, is no less reliable academically and is well based on recent research, especially in archaeology. Without the broad sweep of the van der Woude introductory articles it aims to relate directly the discoveries to life. With its clear reference system and additional reading notes, it will help the reader without other reference works to relate the biblical to other cultures. Though such basics as writing and literature are well covered here also, it gives more insight into everyday family life in town and village, house and home, food and drink including water-supply, agriculture, food, industry and commerce (with tables of weights and measures), trade and travel. A few maps are included from the same publisher's excellent *New Bible Atlas* (1985).

Information on music and games, health and healing, and warfare precede a final section on the religious beliefs, practices and artifacts of Israel and her neighbours and of the first Christians. Bible references are given in the margins (but there is no overall Bible index in this or the van der Woude volume). The

ground covered here will be somewhat helpful for some aspects of daily life than van der Woude, which should be turned to for the geography, text and history. Both will encourage the reader to move on to the more detailed Bible dictionaries happily available to most translators, such as *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (IVP, 3 vols., 1980) and *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Abingdon, 6 vols., 1978).

D. J. WISEMAN

Loader, J. A. **Ecclesiastes: A Practical Commentary**, translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 1986 vii+136 pp.

Loader's commentary is only of marginal help to the Bible translator. His introductory material is useful and not too full, and he includes a brief summary of the major literary forms to be found in the book.

Throughout the book there are some minor points of value to the translator—the play on words in 7.5-7 is mentioned (but not that in 7.1); rhetorical questions are handled well; comments are occasionally made about problems with the RSV or TEV renderings; comments about the structure of passages are generally very helpful. However, textually problematic sections, such as 5.8-9, are often not treated in a manner which would allow the translator to consider an alternative. This is especially important when Loader's own translation is often very different, but we find it only in a footnote.

GRAHAM S. OGDEN

Readers of Dutch will be interested to know of a quarterly published by The Netherlands Bible Society in co-operation with the Belgian Bible Society, and devoted to questions of Bible translation and distribution. It is called **Met Andere Woorden**; it is now in its 6th year of publication; and it is available free from:

Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap  
Postbus 620  
2003 RP Haarlem  
The Netherlands

## BOOKS RECEIVED

Benson, Morton, Evelyn Benson and Robert Ilson: **The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English: a Guide to Word Combinations** (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company 1986; xxxvi+286 pp., no price stated) claims to "tell you which words go together in English and which words do not", and among other things to "show the key differences between American English and British English."