

Book Reviews

Yohanan Aharoni, Michael Avi-Yonah, Anson Rainey, Ze'ev Safrai and R. Steven Notley (eds.), *The Carta Bible Atlas*. Fifth Edition Expanded and Revised, 2011. Carta: Jerusalem. Pp. 232 pages + 40 new maps. \$50. ISBN: 978-965-220-814-9.

What began life as *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, edited by Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah in 1968, has now reached this fifth revised and expanded edition, undertaken by Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley. The change of name to *The Carta Bible Atlas* came with the fourth edition. (2002). Those who believe that an atlas should be primarily a collection of maps will welcome the addition of 40 new ones in this edition. In particular, maps reflecting extra-biblical episodes have been added with the aim of 'placing the biblical events in a solid framework of Near Eastern culture' (Preface to the fifth edition). Its chronological range has been extended by the addition of what the Preface rather grandly calls a 'chapter' (actually a single page) on the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius.

The latest edition continues the approach of its predecessors in concentrating heavily on the provision of maps, the majority of which aim to illustrate quite specific events although some are more general, with information about such things as geographical regions, mountains and rivers, and economy. There is a view that the provision of maps, particularly those which mark routes, battles, campaigns etc. can convey an unwarranted sense of confidence in the historicity of what is being mapped. This is, if course, not a necessary conclusion: works of fiction can be set in 'real' places or maps can be drawn of fictional settings. But there can be a cumulative effect and the reader of a volume such as this can be left with the overriding impression that most events happened as recorded in the biblical or other sources and that they can be mapped. The dust jacket speaks of a 'sweeping cartographic portrayal of biblical history' and the emphasis does indeed appear to be on history.

The Preface does add an important note of caution, pointing out that some sites are uncertain, and that boundaries, and particularly the routes of campaigns and journeys, are often conjectural. But it may be necessary to go further than this. On the map of 'The Exodus and Wandering in the Wilderness' (p.50) the traditional southern route is indicated, whereas in

the 1968 atlas a northerly route was shown, demonstrating that there has been uncertainty as to *where* it happened. However the more fundamental question ‘Did it happen at all?’ is not asked, implying that any uncertainty is geographical rather than historical. The juxtaposing in a single map of ‘The Birth of Jesus and the Flight into Egypt’ (p.173) could imply that the two events are equally likely to be historical; but in the case of the Flight to Egypt it is not just a question of the possible route but of *whether* it happened or (some would say more importantly) *why* the story was told. This is not to deny that the biblical writers had a keen geographical interest and placed their stories in geographical settings. Many of the maps are accompanied by references to biblical passage or other sources, underlining the links between text and geographical situation.

In addition to maps and accompanying text, many atlases include pictures, often now in colour. By contrast, *The Carta Bible Atlas* is not quite monochrome but is black, white and green throughout, apart from the impressive photograph of some of the Qumran Caves on the dust jacket! Opinions differ as to whether or not atlases should include photographs of ‘biblical’ lands and locations. On the one hand things may have changed significantly with the passage of two or three millennia, but on the other hand it may be possible to convey something of the lie of the land, and of such things as flora and fauna, to those who have never visited the region. *The Carta Bible Atlas* does not, on the whole, include pictures of places. It does however include numerous illustrations, predominantly line drawings but with occasional photographs, particularly of artefacts or inscriptions, many of which were present in the first edition. It has to be said that the quality of some of these is not good, some of the captions are rather minimal, and occasionally the positioning of a picture is strange. The object depicted on p.77 may well be a ‘Philistine sword’, but without an indication of its size or its provenance it is difficult to tell! The picture of an Execration Text from Sakkara is now next to a map whose source is given as Texts from the Mari Archives (p.27) and the relief of a fortified city from the palace of Assurnasirpal II at Calah accompanies a map of the Campaign of Pharaoh Shishak (p.96).

There is undoubtedly a great wealth of material in the volume for the reader seeking to understand the Bible in the context of the ancient world, as is to be expected from the expertise of the contributors. But the atlas needs to be used bearing in mind some of these cautionary points about the importance of not confusing history and geography, and remembering that the Bible is above all theology.

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