

MUSSELMAN, L. J. *Figs, dates, laurel, and myrrh. Plants of the Bible and the Quran*. Timber Press, Portland; 2007. Pp 336; illustrated. Price £ 20.00 (hardback). ISBN 978-0-88192-855-6.

Few “books” can be better known than the Bible and the Quran. For centuries they have been memorized by innumerable individuals and recited in countless tongues. In the English-speaking world, phrases from the Bible are familiar even to those who have never opened a copy. There can be few who have not heard about “lilies of the field” or the “rose of Sharon”. Plant names like cedar, palm, frankincense, tares or hyssop are known to people who may have no knowledge of the plants to which they refer. Even olive, wheat and grape, the ancient staples of the Middle East, may be entirely unfamiliar except in a scriptural context. As Lytton John Musselman also points out, very few of the translators of the Bible, including the men who wrote some of the finest prose ever composed in the English language for King James’ “Authorized Version”, could have had “little firsthand knowledge of the plants of the Middle East”. So mistakes were inevitable as they attempted the impossible, to find English vernacular equivalents for the plants named in these ancient texts.

There have been many works about the plants mentioned in the Bible, but none perhaps as well-informed as this handy, colourful tome that wears its scholarship lightly. It is, in effect, a “flora” for the Bible. The Quran contains many fewer references to plants than the Bible, and little has been written about them; including them in this book was “logical and synergistic for botanical and theological reasons . . .”. Professor Musselman’s study was informed by his own botanical research in the Middle East, ranging from Lebanon and Syria to Sudan and Ethiopia as well as Israel and the Palestinian Territories. He has combined his knowledge of the flora, its ecology and ethnobotany, with his knowledge of the Bible to tease out some of the enigmas created by the inadequacies of the translators. For example, “rose of Sharon” was not a rose but probably a weed of cultivated fields: *Gladiolus italicus*. Musselman interprets “lily of the fields” as the crown anemone (*Anemone coronaria*) pointing out that this “lily” possessed a gorgeous flower which out-shone regal robes: “. . . even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” The crown anemone has such a blossom. Other equations will not be unfamiliar to botanists: sycamore, correctly sycomore, is *Ficus sycomorus*, rather than the “sycamores” of the north (neither *Platanus occidentalis* nor *Acer pseudoplatanus*). Pragmatically, Musselman suggests that spiny burnet (*Sarcopoterium spinosum*) formed the crown of thorns because it is flexible and can be twisted into a “crown”. He promotes the apricot (*Prunus armeniaca*) as the tree in the garden of Eden: “Somehow the idea of Eve offering Adam an apricot seems heterodox . . .”, and Garrison Keillor, who contributed a witty foreword, is indeed “bothered by the apple/apricot business.”

With its numerous colour photographs of plants, most taken in the Middle East, an extensive bibliography of relevant publications on ethnobotany, archaeology and natural history, and a good index, Musselman’s book should be attractive to a wide readership, including historians of natural history.

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ROOKMAAKER, L. C. *Encounters with the African rhinoceros. A chronological survey of bibliographical and iconographical sources on rhinoceroses in southern Africa from 1795 to 1875: reconstructing views on classification and changes in distribution*. Schöling Verlag, Münster: 2008. Pp 148; illustrated. Price € 59.00 (softcover). ISBN 9783865230911.

Today we are all familiar with the two species of African rhinoceros, even though they are still commonly known by their inappropriate names of “black” and “white”. But this was not always the case. During the nineteenth century four, five or even six different species were once recognised by illustrious European zoologists until in 1881 the famous big-game hunter Frederick Selous finally rationalised the number down to two. In *Encounters with African rhinoceros* Kees Rookmaaker takes

us on a fascinating journey from among the first European accounts of rhinoceroses in the late eighteenth century to in-depth reviews of the scientific literature of the late nineteenth century in order to explore what was known about rhinoceroses in southern Africa. Rookmaaker documents meticulously all available sources of information, many of which were unpublished before now. An incredible diversity of travellers' accounts and their often stunning illustrations shows how the once widespread distributions of both rhinoceros species in southern Africa became largely eliminated during European colonization. Our understanding of the taxonomy of African rhinoceroses also changed dramatically during this period as more specimens were acquired by European museums. Rookmaaker also provides numerous tables listing locality records (with latitudes and longitudes), and horn, skull and body measurements gleaned carefully from the literature.

The bulk of *Encounters with African rhinoceros* discusses travellers' accounts and contemporary illustrations of rhinoceroses in chronological order. The first account of rhinoceroses in southern Africa was in 1798 by John Barrow, who was private secretary to George Macartney, the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope. Barrow described two species of rhinoceros, but it is unclear which of his records pertain to which of the two species recognised today. By the late 1840s four species of rhino were commonly recognised in southern Africa, including *Rhinoceros simus* Burchell, 1817 (the white rhinoceros), *R. keitloa* (A. Smith, 1836) (a black rhinoceros with a very long second horn), *R. niger* (Schinz, 1845) (a junior synonym of *Diceros bicornis*, the black rhinoceros) and *R. oswelli* (Elliot, 1847) (a white rhinoceros with a long straight first horn), but their local names seem much more interesting, including Borele, Keitloa, Muhooohoo and Kiaboaba; it is a pity these are not in common usage today. While in 1875 William Henry Drummond laboured under the illusion that there were five species of African rhinoceros (three black and two white), only six years later Frederick Selous sorted out the confusion by publishing his account of rhinoceros taxonomy, in which he concluded, on the basis of studying their behaviour in the wild and understanding the wide variation in horn shape, that in fact only two species of African rhinoceros existed.

The last sections of *Encounters with African rhinoceros* list all known museum specimens, whether surviving or not, and plot all the locality records of rhinoceroses listed from travellers' accounts on maps to provide a comprehensive overview of the historical distribution of both rhinoceros species. Overall Rookmaaker has completed a remarkable piece of scholarship, which not only provides a fascinating insight into the history of the distribution and taxonomy of African rhinoceroses in southern Africa, but which will also be of great value to conservationists who are working to restore rhino populations, by allowing them to make informed decisions about where and what species of rhinoceros should be reintroduced.

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