ALPHA BETA

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Category: Reviews

I picked up Alpha Beta: How 26 Letters Shaped the Western World by John Man with high hopes. I love books on specialist issues that are written for laymen. Popular science, medical books, history; I love 'em all. Alpha Beta promised a great read, after all I'm interested in languages and once helped to develop an alphabet myself. Not only that but the New Scientist promised that this book was 'crisp, taut and as clear as a bell..'.

Actually, it was rather dull and boring. The attempts to spice up the story with interesting anecdotes all fell flat on their face and I found myself wishing I'd never started. But things got worse. In a longish section devoted to the alphabet in Israel, the author clearly had not done any serious research or reading around the Old Testament, but presented his opinions as fact.

Towards the end, he managed to call Wycliffe Bible Translators, Wesley Bible Translators and said that we only ever work with Roman alphabets - something that a quick Google search could have disproved - had he wished to do some research.

So, not only is this a dull book; in the areas where I have specialist knowledge, it is poorly researched and edited. This does not give me a lot of confidence in what he has to say in the rest of the book. Much though we appreciate people buying the books we mention on here (Amazon give us a small percentage of the sale price), I'd feel bad taking your money for this one.

Update: Joel of the Excellent "God didn't say that" blog has just pointed me to something he wrote for the Jerusalem Post on the origins of the Alphabet. Take a look here, it's well worth a read.