

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Questioned Documents: A Lawyer's Handbook*

REFERENCE: Levinson J. *Questioned documents: a lawyer's handbook*. Academic Press, San Diego, CA, 2000, 217 pp.

The author has a diverse background in document examination with proficiency in English, Hebrew, and Arabic alphabets. Working with the Israel police has given him a familiarity with other writing systems from all over the world, and judging by his reference citations, his multi-lingual abilities extend to French, German, and Spanish as well.

As a document examiner, I would be fascinated to hear more of his case experience in dealing with these multi-cultural samples. Unfortunately, in a handbook for lawyers, his experience dilutes the content rather than enhances it. Attorneys operating in one legal system will not have more than a cursory interest in decisions stemming from other systems. A similar problem occurs in the bibliographies (these are presented after each topic rather than at the end of the book). An attorney is unlikely to be able to utilize citations in French, Arabic, and German, etc.

There is an even greater problem with the bibliography. The purpose of the references, as stated in the preface is, ". . . so that the lawyer can easily seek further information." A large portion of the

references is unpublished presentations at meetings. This certainly precludes a lawyer's easy search. Additionally, many of the published references are in old, obscure, or limited distribution journals unlikely to be found in a law library, or even in most university libraries. There is also a conspicuous absence of the standard QD texts in the references.

Perhaps the author does not cite the mainstream texts because of his decidedly non-mainstream idea that identifications are not made by comparison of questioned to known materials but rather by the creation of lists of features and "evaluation" of these lists. In his chapter on typewriters, he claims, "It is a procedural error to 'compare' questioned with specimen" (p. 76). In his chapter on handwriting he says, "If the two lists are complete and identical, it can be concluded that the person who wrote the known text also wrote the questioned text" (p. 43). There is no further discussion of what is wrong with comparison nor are there citations in support of his claims. I find these statements to be outrageous, but he is entitled to espouse this methodology if he wishes. Keep in mind however, the audience for this book is supposed to be attorneys, who may need to present or cross examine a document expert in court. The scant information provided will not serve an attorney well.

An attorney attempting to rely upon the information in this text will be woefully unprepared. I would never recommend this text to an attorney as background material. If asked for reference material, I will continue to recommend Ellen² or Hilton,³ both of whom profess their texts to be (at least in part) for the attorney and do a much better job of reaching that audience with helpful information.

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² *The Scientific Examination of Documents*, second edition, 1997.

³ *The Scientific Examination of Questioned Documents*, revised edition, 1993.