

V. TOOLS

In any academic discipline it is essential to discover what are the main tools of the trade. Likewise it is important to learn how to find one's way around the secondary literature, and to distinguish which are likely to be the best reference books, and what are the most reliable sources of information on specific topics. Here some guidance is offered in a selection of important areas.⁹

A. GRAMMARS

These are best divided into two categories, elementary and reference grammars:

Elementary Grammars

There are now a number of helpful beginner's grammars in English, all provided with exercises and glossaries. J. F. Coakley's revision of *Robinson's Paradigms and Exercises in Syriac Grammar* (Oxford, 2002) has introduced many improvements into this long-lived and useful work. Other such works include J. F. Healey's *Lesbono Suryoyo. First Studies in Syriac* (1980; revised edition with accompanying CD, Piscataway NJ, 2005), T. Muraoka's *Classical Syriac for Hebraists* (Wiesbaden, 1987), and W. M. Thackston's *An Introduction to Syriac* (Bethesda, 1999). While most elementary grammars use Serto script, that by Thackston employs Estrangelo, and the vocalization is provided by means of transcriptions. A recent very helpful introduction is provided by George Kiraz in his *The New Syriac Primer* (Second Edition, with downloadable material; Piscataway NJ, 2013). Another very handy reference tool is his *Verbal Paradigms in Syriac* (2010). Since different elementary grammars set out the material in differing ways, it can be helpful to make use of several different elementary grammars at the same time.

⁹ Specifically aimed at Byzantinists, a summary guide to Syriac Studies is to be found in my "Syriac Sources and Resources for Byzantinists", in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London 2006*, I, Plenary Papers (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 193–210.

Comparable beginner's grammars in other languages include: for German, A. Ungnad, *Syrische Grammatik* (2nd ed., Munich, 1932; repr. Hildesheim, 1992) is particularly well set out and has an interesting selection of texts (with a glossary); for French, there is Frey's *Petite grammaire syriaque* (Fribourg, 1984), which uses (vocalized) Estrangelo; and two recent grammars serve for Italian and Spanish readers: M. Pazzini, *Grammatica siriana* (Jerusalem, 1999), and J. Ferrer i Costa and M. A. Nogueras, *Manual de gramática siriana* (Barcelona, 1999). Even more recently a beginner's grammar in Armenian by A. Akopian (Erevan, 2003), and one in Polish (by A. Tronina and M. Szmajdzinski, 2003), have appeared, a gratifying indication of the ever widening appeal that Syriac studies are acquiring!

It is often helpful to start on reading simple vocalized texts at an early stage: for such purposes the grammatical analysis of the Peshitta Gospels in old tools like H. F. Whish's *Clavis Syriaca* (London, 1883) will be especially helpful to those learning the language on their own. Much shorter, but similarly conceived, and with a brief introductory grammatical sketch, are the *Syriac Reading Lessons*, by "The Author of The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon etc.," in other words B. Davidson (London, 1851).

Mention should also be made of some elementary books designed for teaching Syriac to schoolchildren (as opposed to older students). G. Kiraz's *The Syriac Primer* (Sheffield, 1988) has the benefit of an accompanying tape; his more recent *The Syriac Alphabet for Children* (Piscataway NJ, 2004) is aimed at teaching the basic shapes of the letters to young children. One from the Middle East that makes use of English as well as Arabic explanations is Asmar El-Khoury's *Companion* (Beirut, 1972).

Reference Grammars

Of intermediary sized grammars there are German ones by E. Nestle (with an English translation, Berlin, 1889) and by C. Brockelmann (Leipzig, 1899 and many subsequent editions); the latter in particular is very handy. Both these works also contain a selection of texts and a glossary. Of comparable size and coverage in French (but without any texts) is L. Costaz' *Grammaire syriaque* (Beirut, 2nd ed. 1964), where there is a useful typographical distinction between material meant for the less advanced and that reserved for the more experienced student.

The standard reference grammars are those by R. Duval, *Grammaire syriaque* (Paris, 1881) and (above all) T. Nöldeke, *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 2nd ed. 1898); the German reprint of 1966 contains some supplements and an index of passages quoted, and these are included in the reissue of the English translation by J. A. Crichton, *Compendious Syriac*

Grammar (Winona Lake, 2001; the supplementary notes being translated by P. T. Daniels), whose original edition was published in 1904. Although both these works pay generous attention to syntax, there is actually a great need for a specifically diachronic study of Syriac syntax. A much more recent reference grammar is by T. Muraoka, *Classical Syriac. A Basic Grammar with a Chrestomathy* (2nd ed., Wiesbaden, 2005); this also contains a select bibliography on Syriac studies arranged under different topics. A great deal of information, often difficult to discover elsewhere, can be found in George Kiraz's *Turraṣ Mamlla. A Grammar of the Syriac Language*. Vol. 1, *Orthography* (Piscataway NJ, 2012).

Of the older reference grammars, that by A. Merx, *Grammatica Syriaca* (Halle, 1867), in Latin, might be singled out. An intriguing glimpse into the earliest European grammars, produced during the Renaissance, is provided by the facsimiles in W. Strothmann's *Die Anfänge der syrische Studien in Europa* (Göttingen, 1971).¹⁰

It should not be forgotten that there are numerous grammars by native Syriac scholars, going back to Jacob of Edessa in the seventh century. The thirteenth-century polymath, Barhebraeus, even wrote a short verse grammar, as well as a much more detailed one in prose. Of the more recent grammars published in the Middle East mention should be made of the Arabic one by C. J. David (Mosul, 1879; 2nd ed. 1896), the learned Syrian Catholic metropolitan of Damascus and editor of the Mosul edition of the Peshitta (1887–91), and of the French *Clef de la langue araméenne* (Mosul, 1905) by Alphonse Mingana, later of Birmingham fame.

It may come as a surprise that there are several modern grammars produced in India. These are the work of scholars from the various Syriac Churches in Kerala. The most extensive grammar is that by T. Arayathinal, *Aramaic Grammar* (2 vols; Mannanam, 1957, 1959), running to over 1000 pages! This is in East Syriac script, and it includes extensive exercises (both Syriac-English and English-Syriac; a key to them is provided at the end). Ample illustrative examples are provided, and a particularly helpful feature is the separate listing, in the table of contents, of the places in the course of the grammar where questions of syntax are discussed. In the preface the author (from the Syro-Malabar Church) tells how he had, throughout his work, continually received encouragement, “though behind the curtain,” from Mar Ivanios, the Archbishop of Trivandrum who had been the prime

¹⁰ A summary overview of the history of Syriac scholarship in Europe will be found in Section J, below.