

BOOK REVIEWS

John F. Healey, *Aramaic Inscriptions and Documents of the Roman Period*, Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, Volume IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) Pp. xvii + 369. Hardback.

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The volume under review provides a selection of eighty texts, along with translation and commentary, from the following five dialects of Aramaic: Nabataean, Jewish (Palestinian) Aramaic, Palmyrene, Early Syriac (Edessan Aramaic), and Hatran. The volume is billed as the fourth in the series of J. C. L. Gibson's *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, Vol. 1. *Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions*; Vol. 2. *Aramaic Inscriptions including inscriptions in the dialect of Zenjirli*; Vol. 3. *Phoenician Inscriptions including inscriptions in the mixed dialect of Arslan Tash* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971–1982) (traditionally abbreviated *TSSI*), which replaced G. A. Cooke's *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1903). The second volume of *TSSI* is devoted to Aramaic texts from the earliest attestation of Aramaic in the ninth century BCE through the end of the Achaemenid period (ca. 330 BCE). The volume under review follows chronologically upon this with Aramaic texts from two centuries before the turn of the Common Era up to three and a half centuries after it.

The volume begins with two introductory chapters. The first is dedicated to the historical and cultural context of the texts. In the first part of this chapter, Healey surveys the historical context for each of the five geographic centers (Nabataea, Judaea, Palmyra, Edessa, and Hatran). The latter part of the chapter then addresses several broader cultural topics: literacy and bilingualism, ethnicity, law, and religious syncretism. At the end of each section, a short but helpful bibliography is found. The second chapter is entitled 'Epigraphic and Linguistic Introduction'. It begins with a discussion of the various scripts employed, all of which derive from Aramaic scripts of the Achaemenid period. Each script is described separately, and a comparative chart is also provided (p. 30–31). The chapter then moves to a brief overview of the history of Aramaic (following Fitzmyer's chronological classification), and this is

followed by a survey of features for each of the five Aramaic dialects represented in the volume ('Key Features' are summarized in a chart on p. 51). The latter pages are especially valuable since similar lists of features are not readily available elsewhere in the scholarly literature. The chapter concludes with a bibliographic overview of the relevant grammars and dictionaries.

After the two introductory chapters, the remainder of the volume contains a selection of texts from Nabataean (18 texts), Jewish (Palestinian) Aramaic (9 texts), Palmyrene (18 texts), Early Syriac (Edessan Aramaic) (18 texts), and Hatran (17 texts). Each text is presented in transliteration, which is a welcome departure from Gibson's *TSSI* volumes, as it will make Healey's volume accessible to a wider audience (for an additional, ideological motivation, see p. vii–viii). The Jewish (Palestinian) Aramaic and Syriac texts are also presented in script. In general, the presentation of the texts is accurate, though there is the occasional slip (e.g. *rhṁ' mb* for *rhṁ' mb* in line 4 of Text 5 and *wlršp' lhy'* for *wlršp' lhy'* in line 6 of Text 29). One reading does, however, require a brief comment. Instead of Healey's *mprns<n>yṭ'*, the first word of line 5 of text 45 clearly reads *mprsnṣyṭ'* in the published photograph.¹ In the *editio princeps*, however, Ingholt incorrectly read *mprnsyṭ'* with *n* and *s* reversed.² This erroneous reading has found its way into Hillers and Cussini's collection of Palmyrene texts (PAT)³ and now the volume under review (p. 219, 221). The correct reading *mprsnṣyṭ'* must of course be emended to *mpr<n>snṣyṭ'*, a form which is found in an unpublished inscription.⁴ Finally, it should be mentioned that *ṣprns* is likely a Greek loanword in Aramaic.⁵

¹ The photograph is found in H. Ingholt, 'Inscriptions and Sculptures from Palmyra, II', *Berytus* 5 (1938), plate xlvii. For this reading, see already J. Cantineau, *Grammaire du palmyrénien épigraphique* (Cairo: Impr. de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1935), 116; J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 674.

² Ingholt, 'Inscriptions and Sculptures from Palmyra, II', 124, 130.

³ D.R. Hillers and E. Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 36–37 (PAT 0095).

⁴ Ingholt, 'Inscriptions and Sculptures from Palmyra, II', 130.

⁵ See recently S.D. Fraade, 'Local Jewish Leadership in Roman Palestine: The Case of the *Parnas* in Early Rabbinic Sources in Light of Extra-Rabbinic Evidence', in A.I. Baumgarten, H. Eshel, R. Katzoff, and

After the Aramaic text of each inscription, an English translation is provided. This translation tends toward the literal as is appropriate for this type of volume, but it is not overly wooden. There then follows a substantial section of notes. These notes vary considerably in their complexity and scope. Some provide simple glosses (even for basic items such as *dnh* ‘this’ and *dy* ‘which’), others outline grammatical issues or prosopography, while still others discuss the broader cultural and historical context. The notes do not propose vocalizations and thus depart from Gibson’s *TSSI* volumes (but return to Cooke’s *Text-Book*). In general, the content of the notes is reliable, though the specialist will have an occasional disagreement. It is, for instance, surprising to find frequent citations of forms from ‘Jewish Aramaic’ (many with references to Jastrow’s *Dictionary*) since it is now well-established that there is no such entity as ‘Jewish Aramaic’ but rather a number of distinct dialects.

After the presentation of the texts, the volume contains a selection of hand-copies and photographs. The size of this selection represents the only significant shortcoming of the volume. Out of the 80 texts, only 18 are found in a hand-copy or photograph. Thus, in most cases, the reader has no access to the text as it is actually written and so will be forced to track down previous publications. The volume concludes with lexical indices for each of the five dialects and a bibliography.

A key question with a volume such as this is its intended audience. In the introduction, the author unapologetically states that the volume is not ‘intended for the specialist in any of the particular dialects covered’ (p. v). Two audiences are, however, envisioned. The first is students. With this audience, I feel that the volume is certainly a success. The excellent introductory chapters and the extensive commentary should be especially welcome with this audience. Unfortunately, however, the price of the volume is probably beyond most student budgets. The second intended audience is scholars who work in one dialect of Aramaic and want to familiarize themselves with other dialects. Given the increasingly specialized state of Aramaic studies (following the trend of

S. Tzoref (eds.), *Halakhah in Light of Epigraphy* (Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 155–173, esp. 156–157 with n. 5 (contains references to additional literature).

academia more generally), this represents an important aim, and I feel that the volume will prove beneficial to this audience as well.

Finally, several comments are required on the revival of the title *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*. This designation has long been problematic. Gibson's volumes are not limited to inscriptions but also include texts on papyrus (viz. the Aramaic papyri from Hermopolis). This problem is even more accentuated in the volume under review, which contains not only texts on stone and other hard material but also documents written on parchment and papyrus (hence the use of 'Documents' in the main title). The word 'Inscriptions' is then too restrictive. Even more problematic is the label 'Syrian', which should be replaced by 'Northwest Semitic'. The infelicity of the term 'Syrian' was already admitted by Gibson in the third volume of *TSSI*, where he states, 'For the sake of consistency the title *Syrian Semitic* has been retained for the present volume; but I would like to announce that it will not be used in any future editions of the *Textbook*'. Thus, it is regrettable that the volume under review has perpetuated this nomenclature. Finally, on a more practical note, the relationship between the volume under review and Gibson's earlier three volumes introduces a bibliographic inconsistency. The volume under review is entitled *Aramaic Inscriptions and Documents of the Roman Period* and is the fourth volume in the series *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*. In contrast, the previous three volumes by Gibson were entitled *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions* with each volume given a subtitle after the volume number (see the first paragraph for full reference). Though it is not too serious of a problem, this will undoubtedly lead to inconsistency in the citation of all four volumes of the series in the future.

In the end, this fine book is a most welcome addition. Drawing upon his extensive experience with the Aramaic of this time period,⁶ Healey has produced a very useful volume that conveniently brings together a selection of Middle Aramaic

⁶ See, *inter alia*, his *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih* (JSS Sup. 1; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 136; Leiden: Brill, 2001), as well as (co-authored with H.J.W. Drijvers) *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osroene. Texts, Translations and Commentary* (Handbuch der Orientalistik I, 42; Leiden: Brill, 1999).

documentary texts. These texts are important not only for scholars of Aramaic and of Semitic languages but also for classicists, ancient historians (including legal historians), and scholars of religious studies as they provide a window into several Near Eastern communities who lived in the wake of the Seleucid and then Roman empires.