Theodor Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar. With a table of characters by Julius Euting*. Translated from the second and improved German edition by James A. Crichton. And with an Appendix: The handwritten additions in Theodor Nöldeke's personal copy, edited by Anton Schall, translated by Peter T. Daniels. Winnona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2001; reprint of the 1904 edition. xxxiv + 365 pages. Cloth. ISBN 1–57506-050–7. $ 45.00.

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[1] "This book does not claim to be in any respect a *complete* Syriac Grammar" is the first sentence in Theodor Nöldeke's preface to the first edition of his *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1880). However, his lucid description of Syriac orthography and phonology (I), morphology (II), and syntax (III) undeniably is one of the major achievements of Syriac studies in the nineteenth century. Re-edited in 1898, reprinted in 1966, translated into English in 1904, often excerpted and imitated, but never surpassed, it has remained the classical work of reference for Syriac students and scholars throughout the twentieth century. Now, in this splendid photographic reprint, the work seems to be positioned for a new life in the twenty-first century. How telling is this about the quality of the work... and about the state of Syriac grammatical studies in our day?

[2] Nöldeke was the first grammarian to make full use of the new Syriac manuscripts, some from the fifth and sixth centuries, transferred from the Egyptian Monastery of the Syrians to European libraries, which began to be published from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. The use of these new materials, providing a more solid basis for research, along with Nöldeke's rigorous approach set the grammar apart from all previous works on the Syriac language. Although Rubens Duval's *Traité de grammaire syriaque* (Paris, 1881), which in the section on syntax was dependent on Nöldeke, was somewhat similar in scope, the French work, despite its obvious merits, does not exhibit the linguistic skills or the sharpness of judgment appearing in the German work. To the present-day student, Duval's grammar looks much more outdated than Nöldeke's.

[3] Particularly in the study of syntax, Nöldeke's focus is on the Syriac language of the pre-Islamic period, when Syriac was "an absolutely living speech" ("eine völlig lebende Sprache"). Examples

are taken mainly from prose texts originally composed in Syriac, "which adhere to a genuine Aramaic style" ("mit echt aramäischem Stil"). From the ancient versions of the Bible only those passages are quoted which "are free from Hebraisms and Graecisms" (p. IX). In the second edition of the grammar, however, more examples from the Gospels were added, since Nöldeke had then realized that the Syriac Gospels, especially in their pre-Peshitta text forms, "exhibit almost invariably an exceedingly flowing, idiomatic style of Syriac, which upon the whole reads better than the Semitic Greek of the original" ("zeigen fast durchweg ein recht fliessendes, idiomatisches Syrisch, das sich im Grunde besser liest als das semitische Griechisch der Originale" (p. XIII)—one notices here that subtle and elusive German adverbs and adverbial phrases posed serious difficulty to the English translator, e.g. "durchweg" = "invariably," "ein recht fliessendes ..." = "an exceedingly flowing ...," "im Grunde" = "upon the whole").

[4] While this approach still seems to be fully justified, we nowadays would not perhaps draw so sharp a distinction between genuine and less genuine Syriac texts. As a matter of fact, some of the early translations (e.g., the Syriac version of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*)—not unlike the Old Syriac Gospels—are written in a very idiomatic style. Moreover, a number of fourth- to sixth-century prose texts, not known to Nöldeke, would now deserve to be considered. Ephrem's prose writings, the *Book of Steps*, the *Synodicon Orientale*, the writings of John the Solitary and Philoxenus of Mabbog are just a few of the many important texts that have been published after the appearance of the grammar. Nöldeke himself was fully aware of the importance of these newly published texts, as is proven by his handwritten additions to the grammar, which include a number of references to Ephrem's *Prose Refutations* (published 1912–21) as well as a few to the *Synodicon Orientale* (1902). Furthermore, we would nowadays pay more attention to the indigenous tradition of the study of the language, even beyond the period in which Syriac was "an absolutely living speech." Some of Jacob of Edessa's writings, the so-called "Masoretic" traditions, Barhebraeus' grammars and biblical commentaries are directly relevant in this respect. But one immediately has to admit that even today, more than a century after Nöldeke's work, all the texts have not yet been published and all the existing materials have not yet been properly studied.

[5] Nöldeke's basically descriptive and analytical approach and his use of a traditional, rather neutral terminology make the work easily accessible even to present-day (somewhat advanced) students. Although he was thoroughly conversant with the developments of Semitic linguistics in his day—a period of impressive scholarly activity—in his grammar, he did not engage in discussions or speculations in the field of historical or comparative Aramaic or Semitic grammar (some interesting comments and references to Arabic and Hebrew are to be found in the handwritten additions to the grammar). He rather always had the student and the teacher in mind, those who wanted to acquire a thorough knowledge of the language and read Syriac texts (see p. XI–XII).

[6] Notwithstanding the more or less timeless character of Nöldeke's descriptions, there are some fields and topics for which the grammar no longer reflects the present-day state of research. While none of the later grammars offer a more complete picture of Syriac phonology and morphology, the situation is slightly different for (morpho-)syntax. In later grammars as well as in separate studies and monographs, some of Nöldeke's views have been refined, complemented or called into question. It may also be in this field, perhaps, that the lack of a theoretical framework led to certain weaknesses in Nöldeke's descriptions. Among the most recent publications, I would like to single out Gideon Goldenberg's illuminating work "On Syriac Sentence Structure" [in M. Sokoloff (ed.), *Arameans, Aramaic and the Aramaic Literary Tradition* (Ramat Gan, 1983) 97–140; reprinted in G. Goldenberg, *Studies in Semitic Linguistics. Selected Writings* (Jerusalem, 1998) 525–68)] and Jan Joosten's *The Syriac Language of the Peshitta and Old Syriac Versions of Matthew. Syntactic structure, inner-Syriac developments and translation technique* (Leiden, 1996). The recent grammars by Takamitsu Muraoka, [*Classical Syriac for Hebraists* (Wiesbaden, 1987; reprint 1996) and *Classical Syriac. A basic grammar with a chrestomathy* (Wiesbaden, 1997)] and Wheeler M. Thackston [*Introduction to Syriac. An elementary grammar with readings from Syriac literature* (Bethesda, Md., 1999)] contain a good many useful insights and observations, but neither in scope, nor in thoroughness can they compete with Nöldeke's grammar. There can be no doubt that Nöldeke's grammar as a whole still stands unparalleled and basically unchallenged in the beginning of the new century.

[7] The English translation is based on the second edition of the grammar (1898). In comparison with the first edition (1880), Nöldeke, according to his own words had introduced here "a considerable number of improvements in points of detail" ("im Einzelnen ... sehr viel gebessert"), while "abstaining from radical alterations except in a very few cases" ("aber tiefgreifende Aenderungen nur wenig vorgenommen") (p. XIII). James A. Crichton's English translation appeared in 1904. Nöldeke himself added a note to it (p. XVI), in which he expressed his satisfaction with the translator's work. That this approval was not merely a gesture of courtesy is clear from his fierce opposition to an earlier attempt of translation (of the first edition). After having embarked on the translation with Nöldeke's consent, the British translator sent a few samples of his work to the German master, who then realized that the translator "did not sufficiently understand either Syriac or German." Uncertain about the outcome of his complaints, lodged with the translator and with the editor, he emphatically chose to distance himself from the work, which he regarded as "a *monstrum* ... of no value," and he alarmed his colleagues in England and America [a copy of his letter to Isaac Hall, of New York, was reproduced in the American periodical *Hebraica* 2,3 (April 1886) p. 187]. Nöldeke's action apparently resulted in stopping the translation, which, as far as I know, never appeared. James Crichton's translation indeed is a remarkable achievement. Even for students of our day, his English, a hundred years old now and occasionally marked by the underlying German, has not lost any of its accuracy and clarity. It goes without saying, however, that once in a while Syriac students and scholars using the English edition will not resist the temptation to turn to the German original and to keep in touch with the master's original voice!

[8] The *Nachträge* of the German edition (p. 306) have been incorporated as footnotes into Crichton's translation. Under "Additions and Corrections" (p. 318–9), minor mistakes and misprints in the English edition are listed. With a photographic reproduction of J. Euting's table of the different forms of the Syriac alphabet and useful indexes (p. 321–36, absent from the German 1898 edition!), the facsimile reprint of Crichton's work comes to an end. In an *Appendix* (p. 337–65) to the reprint, one finds a new translation, by Peter T. Daniels, of the handwritten additions in Nöldeke's personal copy, as edited by Anton Schall in

the *Anhang* to the German reprint of 1966. While a few post–1930 references (the year of Nöldeke's death) point to Schall's editorial work (as do some notes in which Nöldeke is mentioned in the third person), a small number of references to post–1966 publications, printed between square brackets, have been added by Peter Daniels. Some of them concern the pagan inscriptions of Edessa, ignored in the original work, but mentioned more than once in Nöldeke's handwritten additions. Daniels has added references to the recent editions of H.J.W. Drijvers [*Old Syriac (Edessean) Inscriptions* (Leiden, 1972)] and H.J.W. Drijvers and J.F. Healey [*The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osrhoene* (Leiden, 1999)]. Other additional references concern publications by J. Blau ["The Origins of Open and Closed *e* in Proto-Syriac," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 32 (1969): 1–9] and S. Kaufman [*The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Chicago, 1974)].

[9] In conclusion, there can be no doubt that the decision of the publishing house to bring out this slightly updated and annotated reprint is a most felicitous one. Nöldeke's grammar, in both its German and English versions, still is the best, the most thorough, and the most complete of all existing Syriac grammars. Advanced students as well as Syriac scholars will benefit from it for many years to come. In addition, they may look back on the great achievements of the past with admiration or nostalgia, and find pleasure in the truly beautiful printing work of the once so distinguished Drugulin house at Leipzig!