

BOOK REVIEWS

Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon. A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Winona Lake, Indiana & Piscataway, New Jersey: Eisenbrauns & Gorgias Press, 2009), ISBN 978-1-57506-180-1 & 978-1-60724-620-6, 1 + 1688 pp + CD, Hardback, \$149.50.

SIAM BHAYRO, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

This dictionary is a greatly revised and expanded version of the second edition of Carl Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum* (Brockelmann 1928). It contains the following innovations that make it very much improved and easier to use than Brockelmann's *Lexicon*:

- it is arranged alphabetically rather than according to root
- many citations have been added
- the etymologies have been updated
- the presentation is much clearer, using an attractive Estrangelo font, and with entries divided into paragraphs.

This is the fourth dictionary that Michael Sokoloff has produced, following on from his three Jewish Aramaic dictionaries (Sokoloff 1990, 2002 and 2003). As a former lexicographer, I know first-hand the day-to-day drudgery of the task of compiling a lexicon, and that many of the critical comments by 'metalexicographers' (for the term, see Green 1996, p. 469) display a lack of empathy with the lexicographer's plight. So, as well as affirming Sokoloff's status as the most prolific Aramaic lexicographer of his generation, I should also clarify that all comments in the present review are offered with much appreciation and gratitude for all of Sokoloff's efforts and accomplishments.

Several years ago, I organised *Aramith*, a conference on Aramaic lexicography, at the University of Sheffield (23–25 July, 2002), papers from which were published in subsequent issues of *Aramaic Studies*. At this conference, Sebastian Brock presented a learned assessment of the state of play, as it was then, in the field of Syriac lexicography (subsequently published as Brock 2003). Among Brock's many observations were the following criticisms of the second edition of Brockelmann's *Lexicon*:

1 — the use of Latin, making it unpractical for many modern users (Brock 2003, p. 168; similar comments are made regarding Payne-Smith 1879–1901)

[2] — the failure to consider source texts that date from the late fourteenth century up until the present day (Brock 2003, pp. 168–169; also the case for Payne-Smith 1879–1901)

3 — the use of outdated and often unreliable text editions (Brock 2003, pp. 169–170; again also the case for Payne-Smith 1879–1901)

4 — the use of page numbers instead of Syriac words in the Latin-Syriac glossary, making locating the entry more cumbersome (Brock 2003, p. 167)

Realising that the ideal solution of a completely new and fully comprehensive lexicon is not practical at this time, Brock suggested the following way forward (Brock 2003, pp. 177–178):

5 — build upon the three existing lexicons (Audo 1897, Brockelmann 1928 and Payne-Smith 1879–1901), supplementing largely by means of texts published after 1928, particularly those of the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Scriptores Syri)* and *Patrologia Orientalis*

6 — expand on point 5 by including excerpts from other authors (such as Philoxenos, Jacob of Edessa, Dionysius bar Šalibi and Barhebraeus), translated authors (such as Gregory of Nazianus, Severus and Aristotle), liturgical texts and a selection of unpublished texts

[7] — exclude texts composed during the last five centuries (suggesting that problem 2 cannot be satisfactorily resolved at this point in time).

Sokoloff was present at Brock's *Aramith* presentation and he concurs with Brock's assessment in the introduction to the work under review (p. xv; n. 47 is particularly interesting). The question before us, therefore, is whether or not Sokoloff has succeeded in addressing the problems identified by Brock and resolving them according to his suggested practical solution (ignoring, of course, points [2] and [7]).

The answer in respect of points 1 and 4 is immediately clear. This is, thankfully, a Syriac-English dictionary, and the enclosed CD contains both an index of cited passages and a reverse English-

Syriac index. Two of Sokoloff's previous dictionaries included indices of cited passages (Sokoloff 1990 and 2002), but the reverse index is a new and very welcome feature (cf. my comments in Bhayro 2004, p. 385). Similarly, it becomes clear from Sokoloff's introduction (pp. xv–xvi, nn. 49–51), as well as his list of abbreviations (pp. xxiii–xlix) that he has resolved point 3. For example, Brock's highlighting of Beck's editions of the works of Ephrem (Brock 2003, p. 170) has certainly been addressed by Sokoloff (cf. p. xxxii and p. xv, n. 49).

As already explained, this dictionary is based upon the second edition of Brockelmann's *Lexicon*, so it does not completely fulfil point 5. It would be unfair, however, to criticise this dictionary for not being something it does not claim to be. Indeed, if one were to choose one of the three pre-existing lexicons on which to base a new, expanded edition, then Sokoloff has surely chosen well. Brockelmann's *Lexicon* has long been recognised as the best Syriac dictionary available, and it is a relief to have it in English at long last.

In his introduction, Sokoloff gives us fair warning that point 6 was not his top priority: "Since the purpose of the present work was not to produce a new Syriac dictionary, the writer did not comb the literature to find new entries and meanings. However, an exception was made for two important lexical articles: Juckel, Harklean and Schleifer" (p. xxii). This does, however, bring us to an important point. No matter how much effort is put into such a project, individual scholars will still have to annotate their own copy as they edit and read more and more texts. For example, the other day I was reading a poem by Giwargis Warda (13th century). In the midst of a description of the human body's seven powers, we read ܠܚܥܥܘܬܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܐܢ ... ܠܫܠܥܠܬܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܦܝܢܐ "another is the absorption of food... also that which discharges that which is surplus" (Gignoux 1999, p. 128). Sokoloff's entry for ܠܥܥܡܐ gives the glosses "attractive; distilling" (p. 955). For the former definition, we are also given a Greek term, two references (Ephrem and Galen) and the following extra piece of information: "one of eight natural forces of the body". I will, therefore, need to add the following in the margin: "also, absorption (of food), Gignoux 1999:128; one of seven natural forces". Similarly, the entry for ܠܫܠܥܥܡܐ gives "addition; more numerous" (p. 1632). Again, my marginal note will read: "also, surplus, in rel. to bodily

discharges, Gignoux 1999:128". I am sure that all of us will make similar notes, just as we have done in the past with the previous lexicons.

I mention this because it remains a shame that there is no single designated person or group to whom we can all send new text editions and lexical notes, in order for an online record to be established and maintained. Both Sokoloff (p. xv) and Brock (2003, p. 178) have issued very clear calls for a systematic, coordinated and concerted effort to be made in this regard. The question is, will anyone heed these calls?

Bibliography:

- Audo, T. 1897. *Dictionnaire de la langue chaldéenne* (Mosul: Imprimerie des pères dominicains)
- Bhayro, S. 2004. Review of Sokoloff 1990 (second edition, 2002), *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123.2, pp. 382–385
- Brock, S. P. 2003. 'Syriac Lexicography: Reflections on Resources and Sources', *Aramaic Studies* 1.2, pp. 165–178
- Brockelmann, C. 1928. *Lexicon Syriacum* (second edition, Halle: Max Niemeyer; first edition, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895)
- Gignoux, P. 1999. 'Un poème inédit sur l'homme-microcosme de Guiwar-guis Wardà (13ème siècle)', in Gignoux, P., (ed.), *Ressembler au monde: nouveaux documents sur la théorie du macro-microcosme dans l'antiquité orientale*, (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers), pp. 95–188
- Green, J. 1996. *Chasing the Sun. Dictionary Makers and the Dictionaries They Made* (London: Jonathan Cape)
- Payne-Smith, R. 1879–1901. *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Sokoloff, M. 1990. *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (first edition, Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press; second edition, Ramat-Gan & Baltimore, Maryland: Bar Ilan University Press & The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002)
- _____, 2002. *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan & Baltimore, Maryland: Bar Ilan University Press & The Johns Hopkins University Press)
- _____, 2003. *A Dictionary of Judean Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press).