

Takamitsu Muraoka, *Classical Syriac. A Basic Grammar with a Chrestomathy*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1997, XXVI + 147 + 88* p., (Porta Linguarum Orientalium, Neue Serie 19), ISBN 3-447-03890-X.

**JAN JOOSTEN, UNIVERSITE DES SCIENCES HUMAINES
DE STRASBOURG**

- [1] Coming on the heels of his *Classical Syriac for Hebraists* (Wiesbaden 1987; reprint 1996), the present introduction, too, serves Muraoka's objective of fostering a renewal of the study of Syriac grammar. The book contains an abstract of the grammar (pp. 1–89, with paradigms on pp. 101–17), a few pages of exercises (pp. 90–100), a bibliography prepared by S. P. Brock (pp. 124–47), a chrestomathy (pp. 3*–59*) and a glossary (pp. 62*–88*). I expect that a student who will have gone through the whole work, alone or with a teacher, will be able to take on almost any text written in Syriac. Brock's bibliographical contribution will prove precious to advanced students and mature scholars as well.
- [2] The grammatical exposition is aimed towards clarity and transparency. Words written in Syriac are often accompanied by a transcription so that the student can make sure that he pronounces the word correctly. Paragraphs are usually very short, containing only practical indications; linguistic theory is reduced to a minimum. Abundant examples, taken essentially from the Biblical versions, illustrate the exposition. The anthology contains a very nice choice of texts, each one followed by a selection of grammatical and philological notes. The texts are given in a chronological order not corresponding to their degree of difficulty.
- [3] The book is nicely printed. Syriac texts are given in a very readable Estrangelo, with Nestorian vocalisation in the grammatical section. The anthology contains one text illustrating the Nestorian alphabet, and one in Serto.
- [4] The following remarks, although critical, are not meant to detract from the value of Muraoka's work. They should rather be viewed as a contribution to the ongoing research into the exciting field of Syriac grammar.
- [5] First a few questions of detail may be mentioned:
- p. 62 The expression *benon talmide* in Mt. 14.19 does not express contrast but transition to a new subject (cf. other

examples of this construction in J. Joosten, *The Syriac Language of the Peshitta and Old Syriac Versions of Matthew* [Leiden, 1996] 37).

- p. 65 1 Kg. 15.9 *šadret*, lit. “I have sent,” is an epistolary perfect and not a performative perfect (cf. D. Pardee, “The Epistolary Perfect in Hebrew Letters” *BN* 22 (1983), 34–40, with literature).
- p. 69 It is somewhat confusing to refer to (ʿ)*ḥrinā* “other” as a quantifier.
- p. 84 The first two examples in § 105, *al pagrayn šaliṭ ʿa(n)t (h)u* “you are master of our bodies” and *qadiṣh ʿa(n)t (h)u* “you are holy,” do not illustrate the pattern P—S—s, whatever the definition of Predicate and Subject. In these clauses the enclitic 3ms pronoun in its “focusing” function (cf. § 110) is attached to the predicative nucleus as a whole. The clauses may be rendered “it is (true that) you are a master of our bodies (but you can’t do anything to our souls)” etc.
- p. 84 The pattern S—P—s expresses contrast only when the S is a personal pronoun (as in the examples given); when the S is a noun, no contrastive function may be postulated (cf., e.g., Mt. 26.18 Sin. *zābn(y) qarib (h)u* “my time is near”).

[6]

Secondly, a more serious remark. It is deplorable that Muraoka has not seen fit to exploit a whole series of recent studies of Syriac syntax, in spite of the fact that most of them are listed in Brock’s bibliographical contribution (p. 126–30). In the following instances, at least, the information in Classical Syriac is less exact than what is contained in these studies:

- p. 65 For *lā ḥwā* to be translated as a Present in a negative clause, cf. J. Joosten, *JAOS* 112 (1992): 584–8.
- p. 68 The syntagm *ḥwā qāṭel* “indicates a wish, advice or obligation;” but the syntagm may also be used to refer to repeated action in the past, cf. J. Joosten, *ZAH* 5 (1992): 9–12.
- p. 77 The infinitive may mark its pronominal object either with a genitive or an accusative suffix; but in early texts accusative suffixes are vastly more common, cf. I. Avineri, *Lesbonenu* 38 (1973/4): 223–4.

- p. 81 The tautological infinitive reinforces the verb or indicates the tone of insistence; for a superior analysis, cf. G. Goldenberg, *IOS* 1 (1971): 47–9, 54–7.
- p. 83–6 The theory of the so-called nominal clause falls short of what has been developed in G. Goldenberg, “On Syriac Sentence Structure,” in M. Sokoloff (ed.), *Arameans, Aramaic and the Aramaic Literary Tradition* (Ramat Gan, 1983), 97–140 (for an abstract of Goldenberg, cf. Joosten, *JAOs* 112, 584–6).

[7] Thirdly, throughout the grammar, Muraoka treats Syriac as a homogeneous whole. No effort is made to distinguish between what is regular and what is rare, between what is early and what is late, between what is genuine Syriac and what is calqued on Hebrew or Greek. Since so many of his examples are taken from Bible versions that are both early and translated, this seems a bit problematic. Thus on p. 81, Mt. 16.1 is referred to as an example of an asyndetic participle expressing an accompanying circumstance. It would have been more cautious to state that the construction is exceptional (for discussion, cf. Joosten, *The Syriac Language*, 132–3). Also, the epistolary perfect in 1 Kg. 15.9 mentioned above (with ref. to p. 65) may be due to literal translation from the Hebrew.

[8] As these reflections may show, Syriac grammar is not an open book. It is an exciting field of research where much remains to be done. Students wishing to participate in the debate, or even simply to follow it, will do well to choose the guidance of the present work in preparing themselves. As to one merely desirous to acquire a working knowledge of the language with a view to reading texts, likewise.