

mainly from Septuagint manuscripts, pictorial exegesis of Scripture.

Despite the enormous thoroughness with which the work is carried out, several features make the book difficult to use. There are neither footnotes nor end-notes; everything including bibliographical references is crammed into the main text, and the total effect is visually exhausting since the flow of the text is constantly interrupted. There is no separate bibliography of modern writers, who also appear only in the text. There is a single index, which is devoted to Greek words alone; subjects and exegetical sources are not listed in it.

These criticisms apart, I must say that I have found the book a mine of information for my own work; but it is a great pity that it is not more 'user-friendly'.

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GEORGE ANTON KIRAZ, *The Syriac Primer. Reading, Writing, Vocabulary and Grammar, with Exercises and Cassette Activities* (JSOT Manuals 5). Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1989. 273 pp., cassette. £8.95/\$14.50.

George Kiraz is a young man of the Syrian Orthodox community born in Bethlehem and now living in the United States. He is one of those working to preserve the knowledge of the Syriac language in the 'diaspora': many members of his community have moved to Western countries for political and economic reasons. The primer is therefore dedicated to 'The Syrian-Aramaean Youth, whom I urge to preserve their mother tongue, and the Syriac-Studies Students, whom I urge to revive this ancient tongue'.

The primer itself is produced from camera-ready copy using Kiraz's own word-processing software and Syriac fonts (Multi-Lingual Scholar). The Syriac speaker on the cassette is Kiraz himself, and the listener will be glad to know that this is the 'real thing', the authentic Western Classical Syriac pronunciation as used in the school and monastery of Mor Gabriel in Tur 'Abdin in Turkey (near Diyarbakir). And unlike most of the Syriac grammars of Western authorship, this one presents the classical language as used for communication today, not merely as a tool for patristic texts and biblical manuscripts. Take, for example, a sentence from each of the three modern grammars in English: Robinson (*Syriac Grammar*, 4th edition revised by Brockington, Oxford, 1962), 'The king's daughter will not do that which is not lawful'; Healey (*First Studies in Syriac*, JSOT Press, 1980), 'The church had been made into a fire-temple'; Kiraz, 'The monkey is eating a banana'. 'Banana', *muzo* (Arabic *mauz*), will not of course appear in Payne-Smith's lexicon, nor in the works of St Ephrem, but it is a pretty useful word nonetheless. Various other edibles appear in the primer, and we can guarantee that students using it would not starve in Tur 'Abdin.

However, they might not get very far with Ephrem, or even with the vocalised Syriac of the Peshitta Gospels. The problem with Kiraz's book is that it starts out as a language primer for schoolchildren—endless pages and minutes of cassette time are spent on writing and pronouncing single letters, syllables and simple nouns—and then passes over vast areas of essential grammar with a few misleading notes, to arrive at some fairly complex Syriac texts without any notes or glossary to guide the aspiring Syriacist. The conjunctive *w-* is passed over; *dein* does not appear. Prefixed *l-* is described in a footnote as a preposition, but the author does not explain that it is most often employed as the sign of the accusative. The particle *d-* receives only the cryptic note that 'it has a very wide range of use' (*sic*), and nothing more

specific is said. The existence of the construct and emphatic forms is not mentioned.

As for verbs, the primer fails to explain the lack of a present form for the verb 'to be', and how other expressions fulfil its function. The fact that the 'present' form of other verbs is in reality the active participle and therefore usually needs a personal pronoun with it is not made clear, nor that pronouns with the 'past' and 'future' are mostly redundant. The description of the tri-consonantal root system, which is fundamental in Syriac and other Semitic languages, is confused. Conjugations of 'weak' verbs are given without an explanation of the phenomenon. But the most serious dereliction of the primer lies in the complete absence of any mention of the other forms of the verb: the Pa'el, Ethpa'al, Aph'el and Ettaph'al.

Certainly by the end of the sections on grammar, the student is in no position even to attempt the long passages of Syriac which follow, including sections of the Bible, the creed and the liturgy.

There are also a number of slighter lapses, which are still serious in a beginner's primer. Missing and wrong vowels abound, and half the vocabulary for the story on p. 126 is absent, making it unintelligible unless the reader has worked out how to use Payne-Smith's lexicon. The influence of a guttural in final position in verbs is not pointed out. And the English is strange at times: the verb *bzz*, 'to plunder', is translated as 'striped' on p. 154, 'rob' on p. 158, and 'robe' on p. 162, and earlier we find 'the ship is inside the river', 'the elephant is in the mountain', and 'What Time do You Have?'

These criticisms apart—and they are serious ones—it must be understood that Kiraz's primer and cassette do have some attractive features which Robinson and Healey lack. The pronunciation of Syriac on the tape is extremely helpful, and no doubt a revelation for Syriacists who have never heard how beautiful the language is when used by a native speaker. The quality of the recording is not perfect—we have the tape mechanism sounding like a muted printing press, then an aeroplane overhead, and in a couple of places what could be the author's budgerigar—but Kiraz's Syriac is crystal clear. The real treat is provided by the St George Choir and St Ephrem Choir, from Aleppo, who sing a number of items.

In the primer itself, the long vocabulary sections give the names of biblical books and terms used in education, the church and the government. The chapter on poetry is especially welcome, as it gives examples of most meters and explains scansion. The introduction to Estrangelo and Nestorian scripts is not so different from Healey's, but the section on *Quššāyā* and *Rukkākā* (the softening or hardening of certain consonants) is very good and easily clearer than Robinson's.

The reviewers are both involved in teaching Syriac in the University, and we have to say that we would on no account use Kiraz's primer alone for teaching beginners, and would not recommend it to the autodidact. Robinson's grammar has a few errors, the sentences are tedious and sometimes unnatural Syriac, but his verb tables are very clear indeed. Healey is much more inspiring, though the verb tables are cluttered, and he makes good use of classical texts from the start, which he annotates carefully. There is even an accompanying cassette available; the speaker, Andrew Palmer, is not a native, but has spent much time in Tur 'Abdin. These two grammars are incomparably more useful than Kiraz's primer.

However, we would recommend Kiraz's cassette to beginners, and once they had mastered Syriac from other grammars, they would learn a great deal about Syriac poetry and the use of the language today from Kiraz's book.