

Attention!

This is a representative syllabus. The syllabus for the course you are enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for more information on specific requirements for a given semester.

Syriac I

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ܕܡܫܘܚܐܢܐ ܕܡܫܘܚܐܢܐ

NELC 5125 (3 Units): Grammar of Selected Ancient Near Eastern Languages



Professor:
Office Hours: .
E-mail:

This is an introduction to the most extensively attested and most securely understood dialect of ancient Aramaic, Syriac or Syrian Aramaic, attested in inscriptions and documents from the first century CE and for literature from the third century CE onward. Syriac became the standard literary language of Christians all across southwestern Asia, used by communities on both sides of the prosperous Syrian and Mesopotamian frontier between the Roman and Sasanian Persian Empires. Church missions using Syriac reached as far as southern India and China.

Syriac literature flourished most productively from the fourth to the tenth centuries, making it one of the most important languages for the study of Late Antiquity and the early Islamic period. By the end of the ninth century, Arabic replaced Aramaic as the main written and spoken language among most of the urban Christians of the Middle East, although learned churchmen have continued to compose numerous new texts in Syriac down to the present. Some of these later Syriac works are important historical sources, including, for example, descriptions of the Mongol conquest, philosophical and scientific treatises, and such unusual texts as a Syriac description of a cleric's journey to colonial South America.

Classical Syriac authors composed a number of grammatical and linguistic treatises that let us know fairly precisely how this dialect was pronounced, whereas other dialects of Aramaic are not so well described by ancient authors themselves. Special annotations were developed for Syriac texts, including the Bible, that indicate many features of pronunciation that are otherwise left ambiguous by the script. Because classical Syriac is still used today as a liturgical language by several Eastern churches, we also have at our disposal a number of different continuous, living traditions of pronunciation that assist in our understanding of the ancient pronunciation. All this information makes Syriac an ideal place to start learning ancient Aramaic, since you can learn to speak the language aloud as a real language (called *kthovonoyo* or the literary language by speakers of modern Aramaic), and the pronunciations you learn for this dialect will be approximately correct for other ancient dialects of the same period. Moreover, Syriac orthography is fairly conservative, representing features of the language that were pronounced around the beginning of the first millennium and earlier, but which had been lost in pronunciation by the third century CE. Since learning Syriac means learning many of these archaic spellings, this facilitates moving from the dialects of the first millennium CE to Aramaic texts of a much older time, including the standard administrative Aramaic of the Achaemenian Persian Empire (ca 550-330 BCE), when those spellings represented the current pronunciation, and even going as far back as the earliest inscriptions of the ninth century BCE.

There are, of course, important differences between the dialects, both in grammar and usage—no language remains stable over such a long period and over such a great area—yet experience shows that beginning with Syriac will make it possible to learn any other ancient dialect with relative ease and to approach it not as a code to be deciphered but as a language that was spoken.

Course Outcomes

Students who finish this course will understand all the grammar of the Syriac dialect of Aramaic and will be able to read texts in the original with the aid of a dictionary.

Course Books:

- ◆ Wheeler M. Thackston, *An Introduction to Syriac*, Caravan 1999.
- ◆ Theodor Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, trans. J.A. Crichton, Williams & Norgate, 1904 (reprint with Appendix by Eisenbrauns, 2004).
- ◆ J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, Oxford, 1903.
- ◆ Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, Gorgias 2009.

Online Resources:

- ◆ <http://www.bethmardutho.org/> [Gives access to Syriac computing resources including fonts.]
- ◆ <http://bethmardutho.cua.edu/hugoye/> [Online journal of Syriac studies. A useful source of bibliography for recent publications in Syriac studies.]

GRADING:

100 points possible (A = 93-107, A- = 90-92, B+ = 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82, C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, C- = 70-72, D+ = 67-69, D = 63-66, D- = 60-62, E = 0-59)

20 pts. Brief Monday quizzes (vocabulary, grammatical paradigms, 2 pts. per quiz)

20 pts. Homework (assigned from lessons in textbook)

20 pts. In-class exercises

20 pts. Midterm exam

20 pts. Final exam

Note: Regardless of your point total, you must pass the final to pass the class

Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (<http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>).

Class Attendance Policy

Students should plan to attend all classes. 20% of the grade is based on in-class exercises, and students who miss classes will miss lose points in this category.

Disability policy

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

SCHEDULE (subject to changes!):

Week 1: Aug 24, 26

Introduction to Aramaic and Syriac. Preliminary. Lesson 1.

Introduction to Aramaic. Phonemics. Sound rules: stress, syllabification, spirantization, retrogressive vocalic reduction. Script. Gender. G-verb concept.

Week 2: Aug 29, 31, Sept 2

Lessons 2-3.

Perfect verb. Direct objects. Pronominal suffixes. Relative clauses.

Week 3: (no class Monday Sept 5 due to Labor Day) Sept 7, 9

Lessons 4-5.

Possession. *Koll*. More on pronoun suffixes. Plurals.

Week 4: Sept 12, 14, 16

Lessons 6-7.

Pronouns. Copulas. Demonstratives. III-weak verbs.

Week 5: Sept 19, 21, 23

Lessons 8-9.

Active participles. Adjectives. Pronoun suffixes type II.

Week 6: Sept 26, 28, 30

Lesson 10-11.

I-yod verbs. Construct state. Adverbs. Hollow verbs. Geminate verbs.

Week 7: Oct 3, 5, 7

Midterm Oct 3! Lesson 12.

Passive participles.

Week 8: Oct 10, 12 (no class Friday Oct 14 due to Autumn Break)

Lessons 13-14.

Absolute state. Numbers. Infinitive. Imperfect verb, part 1.

Week 9: Oct 17, 19, 21

Lesson 15.

Imperfect verb, part 2.

Week 10: Oct 24, 26, 28

Lessons 16-17.

The Pa‘‘el. The Aph‘el.

Week 11: Oct 31, Nov 2, 4

Lessons 17-18.

Medio-Passive verbs. Ethp‘el.

Week 12: Nov 7, 9 (no class Nov 11: Veteran’s Day Observed)

Lesson 19.

The Ethpa‘‘al.

Week 13: Nov 14, 16, 18

Lesson 20.

The Ettaph‘al.

Week 14: Nov 21 (no classes Nov 23, 25, due to Thanksgiving)

Reading practice.

Readings in the Peshitta.

Week 15: Nov 28, 30, Dec 2

Reading practice and Review.

Readings in the Peshitta. Review.

Week 16: Dec 5, 7

Reading practice and Review.

Final Exam: Thursday Dec 15, 2:00-3:45 in the regular class room