CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Resources for Biblical Study

Edited by

Steven L. McKenzie

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

Number 46

AN INTRODUCTION TO ARAMAIC

Corrected Second Edition

by

Frederick E. Greenspahn

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

AN INTRODUCTION TO ARAMAIC

CORRECTED SECOND EDITION

by

Frederick E. Greenspahn

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta, Georgia

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

AN INTRODUCTION TO ARAMAIC

Corrected Second Edition

by

Frederick E. Greenspahn

Copyright © 1999, 2003, 2007 by the Society of Biblical Literature

First Edition 1999
Second Edition 2003
Corrected Second Edition 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by means of any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to the Rights and Permissions Office, Society of Biblical Literature, 825 Houston Mill Road, Atlanta, GA, 30329 USA.

Funerary Inscription of Uzziah, Jerusalem. 1st Century B.C.E.–1st Century C.E. is from the Collection, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Photo © The Israel Museum. Used with permission.

Dolerite wall relief from Sinjerli (Sam'al) showing King Barrekib on his throne with a scribe. Aramean c. 750 B.C.E. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany. Used with permission of Foto Marburg/Art Resource, NY.

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Greenspahn, Frederick E., 1946–
An introduction to Aramaic / by Frederick E. Greenspahn.—2nd. ed.
p. cm. — (Resources for biblical study ; no. 46)
ISBN 1-58983-059-8
1. Aramaic language. 2. Bible. O.T.—Language, style. I. Title. II. Series.
PJ5211.G74 2003b
492'.29—dc21

2003001992

11 10 09 08 07 5 4 3 2

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

Contents

Preface ix

Abbreviations xiii

Chapter 1 — Introduction 1

Chapter 2 — A Brief History of Aramaic 5

Chapter 3 — The Aramaic Language
Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34, Jeremiah 10:11, Ezra 4:8–11 8

Chapter 4 — Consonants
Ezra 4:12–16 13

Chapter 5 — Vowels
Ezra 4:17–24 19

Chapter 6 — Nouns, Definite Article
Ezra 5:1–5, Mark 14:36 (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6) 25

Chapter 7 — Verb System
Ezra 5:6–10 32

Chapter 8 — G Perfect
Ezra 5:11–15 36

Chapter 9 — G Participle
Ezra 5:16–6:5 42

Chapter 10 — Vocabulary
Genesis 31:47, Ezra 6:6–12 47

Chapter 11 — Independent Pronouns, אֲנָה
Ezra 6:13–18 54

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

Chapter 12 — Prepositions
Ezra 7:12–26 61

Chapter 13 — Pronominal Suffixes
1 Corinthians 16:22, Daniel 2:4–13 66

Chapter 14 — Demonstrative, Relative, and Interrogative Pronouns
Daniel 2:14–24 73

Chapter 15 — G Imperfect
Daniel 2:25–36 78

Chapter 16 — Adjectives and Genitive Constructions (דְּ)
Daniel 2:37–49 84

Chapter 17 — Numbers
Daniel 3:1–12 89

Chapter 18 — G Imperative and Infinitive
Daniel 3:13–23 95

Chapter 19 — D Conjugation
Daniel 3:24–33 100

Chapter 20 — H Conjugation
Daniel 4:1–9 106

Chapter 21 — Weak Verbs (Initial נ, א and ה, Gutturals, Hollow Verbs, Final ה and א, Geminates)
Daniel 4:10–19 112

Chapter 22 — Unusual Verbs (הוה, הלך, יכל, סלק, עלל)
Daniel 4:20–34 120

Chapter 23 — Syntax
Daniel 5:1–12 123

Chapter 24 — Passive Conjugations
Daniel 5:13–29 129

Chapter 25 — Reflexive Conjugations
Daniel 5:30–6:10 135

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

Chapter 26 — Other Conjugations (*afʿel, shafʿel, itpeʿel*)
Daniel 6:11–29 142

Chapter 27 — Daniel 7:1–28 149

Chapter 28 — Inscriptions: Bar Rakib, Uzziah, Ein Gedi Synagogue 167

Chapter 29 — Letters: Elephantine and Bar Kochba 176

Chapter 30 — Dead Sea Scrolls: The Genesis Apocryphon 186

Chapter 31 — Midrash: Genesis Rabbah 191

Chapter 32 — Targum: Pseudo-Jonathan 197

Afterword 207

Paradigms 211

Glossary 220

Answer Key 231

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

PREFACE

This book is intended for students who are just beginning to study Aramaic. Seldom is it the language's inherent value which attracts such individuals; more often, they are motivated (if not always directly) by an interest in the Bible, although some may want to explore early Judaism or Christianity as well. This fact has several fairly obvious corollaries for a book such as this. First, it means that those using it already have some familiarity with Hebrew, typically biblical Hebrew. At the same time, however, that knowledge is probably rudimentary, given the stage at which most students are encouraged, or expected, to learn Aramaic. Finally, it suggests that students are likely to proceed to other Aramaic texts or other Semitic languages, whether they realize it yet or not. In other words, although biblical Aramaic is usually introduced as an end in itself, it most often functions as a bridge between the Hebrew Bible and some other, related area.

This text tries to take these facts seriously. Recognizing students' existing knowledge and motivation, it treats Aramaic as if it were a dialect of Hebrew, without trying to cover all of the language's depth and richness. This is a widespread, if seldom acknowledged, approach with a long pedigree. The fourteenth century grammarian Profiat Duran described Aramaic as "the Holy Tongue corrupted" (לשון הקדש שנשתבש).* That, however, is a patently inaccurate and very unfair way to characterize an independent language that has produced several quite separate bodies of literature, each historically and linguistically important in its own right.

Our only justification for this approach is pedagogic utility. Indeed, pedagogic considerations have governed most of the presentation here, which has been kept as non-technical as possible. Thus verb, noun, and pronoun charts include hypothetical forms (unmarked) on the premise that students will find it easier to learn patterns as a whole without trying to distinguish attested from theoretical forms or to remember where direct evidence is lacking. Where several alternative forms exist, only one is presented. The selection of these preferred forms has frequently been difficult, especially in cases of *ketîv* and *qerê*, where the problem of deciding whether it is pre-Christian or masoretic Aramaic that is being taught had to be con-

Ma'aseh Efod, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna: Haltswarte, 1865) p. 40.

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

fronted. Our decisions have been somewhat eclectic. Thus the second person masculine singular pronoun is presented as אַתְּ, in conformity with the *qerê*, rather than the presumably earlier *ketîv* אַנְתְּ, while proper names have been presented exactly as they occur in the standard *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*; thus דָּנִיֵּאל, despite the obvious anomaly in the placement of the vowel. In order to ensure the consistency of what students encounter, the biblical text has occasionally been normalized to fit the regular patterns taught in the grammar. Students may, therefore, wish to read the original exactly as it appears in the Bible after finishing this course.

Pedagogical concerns have also affected terminology. Thus the conjugations are identified as G, D, and H in order to facilitate comparison among Semitic languages, which would be complicated by terms such as *peʿal*, *paʿʿel* and *hafʿel*, which are appropriate for Aramaic alone.

A word about the terms "conjugation" and "tense" is also in order. The nature of the phenomena which these terms designate is enmeshed in difficult technical issues. We have chosen to use terms that are likely to be familiar from the study of other languages, letting instructors choose whether to describe the problems involved or to leave that for some later stage of study. Similarly, the periodization presented in chapter 2 is only one of several that are possible. Since any such scheme is inherently arbitrary and heuristic, a straightforward one that would facilitate clarity was selected.

It should by now be obvious that this is not intended to be a reference work, although paradigms and a glossary are included at the end. There is already an abundance of advanced and technically proficient resources for those who choose to continue beyond the introductory level. This book is meant to help students take advantage of those tools. It has, therefore, been constructed as a kind of workbook, organized around the Aramaic passages from the Bible. These are at first simplified and abridged, in order to keep the quantity of new vocabulary to within manageable proportions. Daniel 7, the last biblical passage in Aramaic, is read exactly as it occurs in the Bible (chapter 27).

Each chapter introduces a grammatical feature. Vocabulary has been coordinated with the biblical passages and divided into two sections: words that are "To Be Learned" and others that are for "Reference" only. This distinction makes it possible to define all the words that appear in the selected biblical readings without requiring students to learn more than about ten at a time. Definitions of "Reference" words are repeated in any chapter in which they recur. Of course, all vocabulary words are listed in the glossary, which is not a complete lexicon of biblical Aramaic, but contains only words actually used in the passages which appear in this book; for that reason, it also includes the handful of Hebrew terms that occur in some

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

of the late texts presented in the readings. Both grammar and vocabulary are reviewed in practice exercises.

While there is much about this presentation of the material that may appear idiosyncratic, I am deeply aware of my debt to many scholars whose knowledge and experience of Aramaic far exceeds my own. Experienced teachers will likely recognize the influence of Ethelyn Simon, Irene Resnikoff, and Linda Motzkin's *The First Hebrew Primer* (3d edition, Oakland, CA: EKS Publishing Co, 1992), Isaac Jerusalmi's *The Aramaic Sections of Ezra and Daniel* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1972), and Ehud ben Zvi, Maxine Hancock, and Richard Beinert's *Readings in Biblical Hebrew, An Intermediate Textbook* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), a debt gratefully acknowledged. The grammar draws heavily on Franz Rosenthal's *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1963) and Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander's *Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramäischen* (Halle/Saale: Max Niemayer Verlag, 1927). Rather than supplanting these valuable tools, this book is intended to prepare students to use them easily and profitably. Like training wheels, the surest sign of its success will be when it is no longer necessary. For students to outgrow it will, therefore, be a source of pleasure rather than evidence of its inadequacy. Indeed, after finishing this course, students should be encouraged to acquire other tools, primarily Rosenthal's *Grammar*, which is in English and in print.*

Several individuals contributed to this project in a variety of ways. Marvin Sweeney and David Petersen had the confidence to propose that I undertake it in the first place. Barbara Beckman helped with technical elements of preparing the manuscript, while Jeanne Abrams and Diane Rutter provided a supportive environment. Paul Kobelski and Maurya Horgan shared their skill and creativity to bring that manuscript to final form. Paul Flesher, Peter Miscall, Gary Rendsburg, and Seth Ward reviewed an earlier draft, rooting out errors and proposing improvements, while David Ackerman, Scott Althof, Susan Brayford, Gary Collier, Brandon Fredenberg, Arlene Lance, Joy Lapp, Gilberto Lozano, Aquiles Martinez, Andrew Tooze, and David Valeta shared students' perspectives. Special gratitude belongs to those who have shared their observations about earlier editions, particularly, the errors and problems they found in it. Steven E. Fassberg, Richard Hess, Joseph L. Malone, Scott Noegel, Ken Penner, Max Rogland, Antoon Schoors, Eileen Schuller, and Eibert Tigchelaar, provided

*Other grammars which might be helpful are Alger F. Johns, *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1972) and Elisha Qimron, ארמית המקראית (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik and Ben Gurion University, 2002).

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

particular assistance in this regard. For all of these contributions I am deeply grateful. Any other corrections or suggestions readers can share with me would be very much appreciated. In the end, the decision of how to use the information they so generously shared was my own along with responsibility for the finished product, which often, but not always, followed their suggestions. I hope it will provide a straightforward introduction to a subject rarely begun in a simple way and a coherent enough presentation to kindle interest in proceeding further.

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

ABBREVIATIONS

A	alef (א) stem (*ʾafʿel*)
c	common (number)
cstr	construct
D	D stem (*pǐʿel* or *paʿʿel*)
f	feminine
G	G stem (*qal*, *peʿal*)
H	H stem (*hifʿil* or *hafʿel*)
imf	imperfect
imv	imperative
inf	infinitive
inter.	interrogative
intrans	intransitive
lit.	literally
m	masculine
obj.	object
p	plural
pass	passive
pf	perfect
ptc	participle
s	singular
š	šin (ש) stem (*shafʿel*)
sf	suffix
t	conjugation with prefixed *t* (as in Hebrew *hitpaʿel*)
trans	transitive

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

www.TheCMSIndia.org

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA
REG. NO. 118/IV/2016

For further information
regarding this text Please contact:

info@thecmsindia.org
library@thecmsindia.org

Please join the
'CMSI Benefactors Club'
and support the ongoing projects of
Christian Musicological Society Of India

- DIGITAL LIBRARY
- ARAMAIC PROJECT
- DIRECTORY OF CHRISTIAN SONGS
- ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SYRIAC CHANTS
- MUSIC ICONOGRAPHY
- CHRISTIAN ART