

Introduction to Classical Syriac

Level: the course is open to MA and PhD-level students

CEU credits: 2

Academic year: 2017/2018

Semester: Fall

Unit: SLTG

Specialisation: Eastern Mediterranean Studies

CEU Instructor: István Perczel

Brief course description:

Classical Syriac (*Ktobonoyo*: the Bookish Language) is an Aramaic dialect that served as the literary language of the Aramaic-speaking Christian communities. The golden age of Syriac literature extended from the third to the seventh century AD and has produced a great amount of important literature, partly as original works and partly as translations from the Greek. After the Arab conquest of the Middle East, besides producing original works, Syriac served as a bridge language and culture between Greek and Arabic; its influence extended as far as India and China, while the Syriac alphabet constituted the basis for the Sogdian and Uygur scripts, thus indirectly influencing Tibetan and Mongolian, too. Diverse Asian Christian communities have used Classical Syriac as a liturgical and literary language up to the present day. The present course is offered to those just beginning their Syriac studies and intermediate students.

For the beginners, the course will be an intensive introduction to this language. It will teach Syriac partly as classical but partly as a living language. Intermediate students will continue the grammar classes and the exercises taken in the beginner's phase.

Learning Outcomes:

If there are both beginners and intermediate students who are taking the course, two separate groups will be formed.

Beginners will learn the Syriac alphabet (Estranghelo, Serto, East Syriac), vocalisation, the use of the diacritic points and the basics of pronunciation. They will be more thoroughly acquainted with the Serto script and the West Syriac pronunciation. They will learn to read and understand simple Syriac texts and, by the end of the semester, will be capable to compose Syriac sentences orally and in writing. They will be acquainted with the basics of Syriac grammar, too.

Intermediate students will refine their grammatical skills and their ability to compose Syriac sentences. They will do translation exercises and will be asked to maintain short conversations in Syriac. They will learn how to understand an unknown text written in Syriac. They will improve their skills of comprehension and of grammatical analysis.

Methodology:

The methodologies of learning modern and classical languages differ in the sense that, in the case of modern languages, one strives to acquire an active knowledge allowing to conduct conversations and correspondence as well as writing composition, while in the case of classical languages one is satisfied with the passive capability of reading and understanding texts. However, a number of classical languages, such as Hebrew, Classical Arabic and Sanskrit, are also living languages being actively used. To this group belongs also Syriac.

Accordingly, the teaching/learning method will be a blend of the classical European grammar-based approach and of the methodology followed in the transmission of the language in the communities themselves. Thus, besides an introduction to grammar, there will be constant exercises in translating and composition.

For both groups, the main manual that we will follow is the *Hergē d-Keryono [Reading Lessons]* of Abd al-Masih Naaman Karabash. This is the manual that West Syriac *malfōnē* (teachers of Syriac) prefer for teaching and which was used by the instructor's *malfōnō*, Abuna Mushe from St Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem.

Assessment:

During the term, the students will write one or two tests on the material studied (25%); however, as the classes are based on the students' active involvement, participation in the classes will remain the most important basis for assessment (75%).

Manuals and literature:

Abd al-Masih Naaman Karabash, *Hergē d-Keryono [Reading Lessons]* (Hengelo NL: Mar Yuhanun Kilisesi, 1985), vols. 1-2

John F. Healey, *Leshono Suryoyo: First Studies in Syriac* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005)

Sebastian Brock, *An Introduction to Syriac Studies* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006)

Grammatical notes by the instructor

Dictionaries:

J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: The University Press, 1902; reprint: Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999)

Archpriest Zeki Zitoun, *Burkho: English to Syriac Dictionary* (Sydney: Archpr. ZekiZitoun, 2007)

The manuals, grammatical notes and dictionaries can be found at the e-learning website of the course: <http://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=7606>

Schedule:

The actual schedule will depend on the constitution of the group, the initial level of the students and the pace of progress of the group. So, it is impossible to break down the schedule to weeks etc.