

Eric D. Reymond, *Complete Aramaic*. London: John Murray Press, 2021. xviii, 326 pp. £39.99 paperback. ISBN 978 147362 776 5

The cover of *Complete Aramaic* shows the 8th-century BCE relief of king Bar-Rakib from Zincirli, which features an Old Aramaic inscription at the top. This front image perfectly encapsulates the broad focus of this recent addition to the *Teach Yourself* imprint. The textbook's main goal is to introduce the learner to the basics of Biblical Aramaic, but it also incorporates other extracts taken from the language's long and fascinating history.

This clearly structured textbook is divided in two main parts. The first part, which covers units 1-21, focuses on Biblical Aramaic grammar and texts. The various readings and exercises ensure the student has mastered the newly acquired grammatical concepts before progressing unto the next unit. Whereas many Biblical Aramaic textbooks assume the student already has an understanding of Biblical Hebrew and, hence, overlook the phonological aspects of this language, *Complete Aramaic* starts from the very beginning. It explains the consonants, (semi) vowels, vowel letters, and syllable patterns. Plentiful exercises acquaint the student with authentic texts from the earliest stage of learning. For instance, in Unit 1 the student is asked to match selected Aramaic words from Daniel 5:2 with their transliteration. However, the readings are not only taken from Daniel and Ezra, also extracts from the Targumim are woven into the exercises, for which an answer key is provided at the end of the book.

Units 22-24 form the second part and they are intended for the student who wishes to extend their knowledge of Aramaic. Each unit introduces the text and grammar of a different dialect (or dialects, in the case of the Targumim). This second part starts with Targum Onqelos and Targum Neofiti, subsequently moves on to the Dead Sea Scrolls (Genesis Apocryphon and Apocryphon of Levi), and it finishes with the Elephantine papyri (The Words of Aḥiqar, Hermopolis letter 1). At first sight, this achronological ordering seems counterintuitive, but it eases the student into reading unvocalized texts. The textbook concludes with an additional reading practice, which consists of the text and translation of Daniel 4-5 and helpful comments.

Besides the brief introduction to the history of Aramaic, there are many interesting historical and cultural insights scattered throughout the book. For instance, the learner will understand why Aramaic speech is often reserved for demons and demoniacs in Hollywood movies (spoiler alert: this association goes back, among others, to a patristic account about a possessed, Aramaic speaking camel). Fascinating anecdotes such as these make the process of learning Aramaic even more dynamic and exciting.

This textbook contains helpful additional features, such as an overview of the correspondences of verse numbers in Daniel in the BHS edition and English-language Bibles, strong and weak verb tables, a glossary of grammatical terms, an Aramaic – English glossary, and suggestions for further reading.

Though academically rigorous, the textbook never has an overwhelming feel to it. The author's academic expertise certainly comes to the fore but it is combined with an eye for the pedagogical needs of the first-time Aramaic learner. This textbook is an excellent and high-standard resource for those who wish to immerse themselves in the Aramaic language and gain insight into its historical and cultural importance throughout the ages.

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