

Heinz-Dieter Neef. *Arbeitsbuch Biblisch-Aramäisch. Materialien, Beispiele und Übungen zum Biblisch-Aramäisch. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck: 2018. Pages 1-208+XVIII. ISBN 9783161560125.*

The Aramaic sections of the Old Testament are usually grouped, from the linguistic point of view, under the label “Biblical Aramaic”, which in its turn is considered one of the “biblical languages”. Following this trend, the number of grammars and handbooks dedicated to the study and especially to the teaching of Biblical Aramaic has been constantly increasing over the last few decades, especially if compared to other Aramaic varieties such as Syriac, not to say Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Mandaic, or the epigraphic varieties like Palmyrene Aramaic or Nabataean Aramaic. The list provided in the book under review (pp. 5-6) is representative of the situation.

In this sense, the third revised and improved edition of the book under review is not an addition to existing scholarship in the field, but rather a further improvement for the didactic practice of this Aramaic variety.

Following a well-established trend in handbooks and grammars of ancient Semitic languages, the text presents Biblical Aramaic according to the sequence phonology-morphology-syntax, each in its turn worked out in categories (e.g. the verbs are grouped in “strong verbs”, “1st-laryngeal-verbs”, etc.). In spite of the quite traditional approach, the single grammatical issues are not treated in an arid way, but, on the contrary, they are always flanked by properly explained, well conceived examples and exercises.

The book is evidently the outcome of the long didactic experience of the author, who has been teaching for many years at the Universität Tübingen. This background emerges in the very clear and synthetic texts he puts at the beginning of the explanation of all issues, but especially where the object of discussion might possibly raise problems in the understanding of students and researchers with no experience of Aramaic or of Semitic languages as a whole. See, for example, Exercise no. 1 (p. 16), which concerns the reading of the vocalic signs of Masoretic tradition. In this case the student may easily check whether s/he is learning the correct vocalization simply by trying to compare her/his reading with the key to that exercise on p. 188. In fact, the possibility of checking the readings and even self-correcting the exercises is one of the strong points of this text. Furthermore, it opens the book to the use by non-specialists and amateurs.

The basis of both exercises on single sentences and translations are the Aramaic sections of the Old Testament (Dan 3, 1-30; 4, 1-34; 6, 2-29; 7, 1-8. Esr 4, 8-16; 5, 1-6, 18), which are presented, together

with all Square Script texts in the book, in Masoretic vocalization and punctuation. This provides the readers with the real picture of the original text and lets them appreciate the visual appearance of Biblical Aramaic.

In the framework of Biblical Aramaic grammars and handbooks, this book stands out as a genuine “work-book”, where grammar has an important role but the real focus is on learning, understanding, and applying rules in their real textual implications. For this, the Author is to be congratulated, as he has certainly made a further contribution to the interest into Biblical Aramaic and its Biblical background.

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