

Basics of Classical Syriac: Complete Grammar, Workbook, and Lexicon by Steven C. Hallam

[A Wonderful Resource And I Would Even Say It Is The ...](#)

Basics of Classical Syriac by Steven C. Hallam is a beginning Syriac grammar, workbook, and lexicon all in one and can be used by independent learners or a classroom setting.

Of the early translational languages of the New Testament, none is more important than Syriac. A working knowledge of Syriac provides a lens from which to study the early texts of the Greek New Testament, the Peshitta (the Syriac translation of the Bible), and various early church history texts and commentary, thus Basics of Classical Syriac is useful for students across a range of disciplines. Workbook exercises for each chapter enable students to know whether they are grasping the fundamentals of the language.

Basics of Classical Syriac provides an ideal first step into this ancient language and focuses on getting the student into text translation as quickly as possible.

Features:

* Zondervan

My Personal Review:

Several assumptions in place here: 1) you are interested in this book because you are looking for a primer of sorts in Peshitta Syriac/Aramaic because of an interest in Ancient Studies, Biblical Studies, Church History, or related subject matter. 2) You have studied (with middling success or better) a Semitic language before such as Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, possibly Geez or Coptic, or maybe even Akkadian or Arabic. Not that its a necessity, but honestly Syriac and this book is not a good starting place for introduction to the structure and study of ancient Semitic languages.

Though not a requisite, there are too many Semitic language foundational matters integral to successful study of Syriac as presented here that the student should bring from a knowledge of Biblical Hebrew or Aramaic, that to try to make progress without them in place would leave a novice student frustrated and perplexed. Prof. Hallam provides useful indices and writes

from that perspective (of the experienced student coming from a Semitic language background) to put that to use.

Those two aside, I will only compare this to Professor Thackston's Introduction to Syriac. Introduction To Syriac

Prof. Hallam keeps in mind this is written for the Zondervan Basics of series. He directs interested students looking for more sophisticated and analytic treatment of grammatical and lexical issues to Noldeke (Compendious Syriac Grammar, with an Appendix) or other reference works. That is a good thing. This is an introduction and basic of and there is more than enough to master and keep one busy here for the student new to Syriac. Professor Thackston's book presupposes an instructor to direct and redirect, though not obviously required to get something out of it. Professor Hallam contemplates the student working with good Biblical studies software to gain access to Peshitta texts etc., and draw up comparative textual resources. Prof. Thackston's book requires more diligence at first from the self-directed student, and may slow things down for the DIYer; this book moves things along quickly to get to reading actual texts to reward early moderate persistence even for one working apart from formalized settings.

Personally I enjoy them side-by-side. Prof. Hallam knows his target audience and exhorts them accordingly. Learning Syriac to the point where it is actually useful to a student or scholar requires more than an hour or two a week, obviously, and a beginner's text can't do the work for you. I think the person who could most benefit would be someone fresh off intermediate Biblical Hebrew, for example, such that the linguistic concepts are still close at hand.

If Syriac is your third or subsequent Semitic language then you may prefer Thackston's more traditional structure and direction.

A very minor observation (not a critique) is that Professor Hallam takes issue with misconceptions of names of Eastern/Western scripts, and takes pains to point out that a Church schism in the 5th century is likely responsible for the divergences of scripts and tradition. Apparently terminology like Jacobite and Estrangela are worth disputing over to some people, which really is quite beside the point if we agree on what branch of Aramaic/Syriac/Samaritan we are referring to. Another key insight I found telling is that, as if he is tired of reminding Biblical students, Syriac is not *derived from* Biblical Hebrew but developed alongside it, as part of

another branch of Northern Semitic languages. What majority scholarly position would argue otherwise?

The exercises come through clearly, and it is obvious Prof. Hallam knows first hand from the classroom what is helpful and what is not.

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