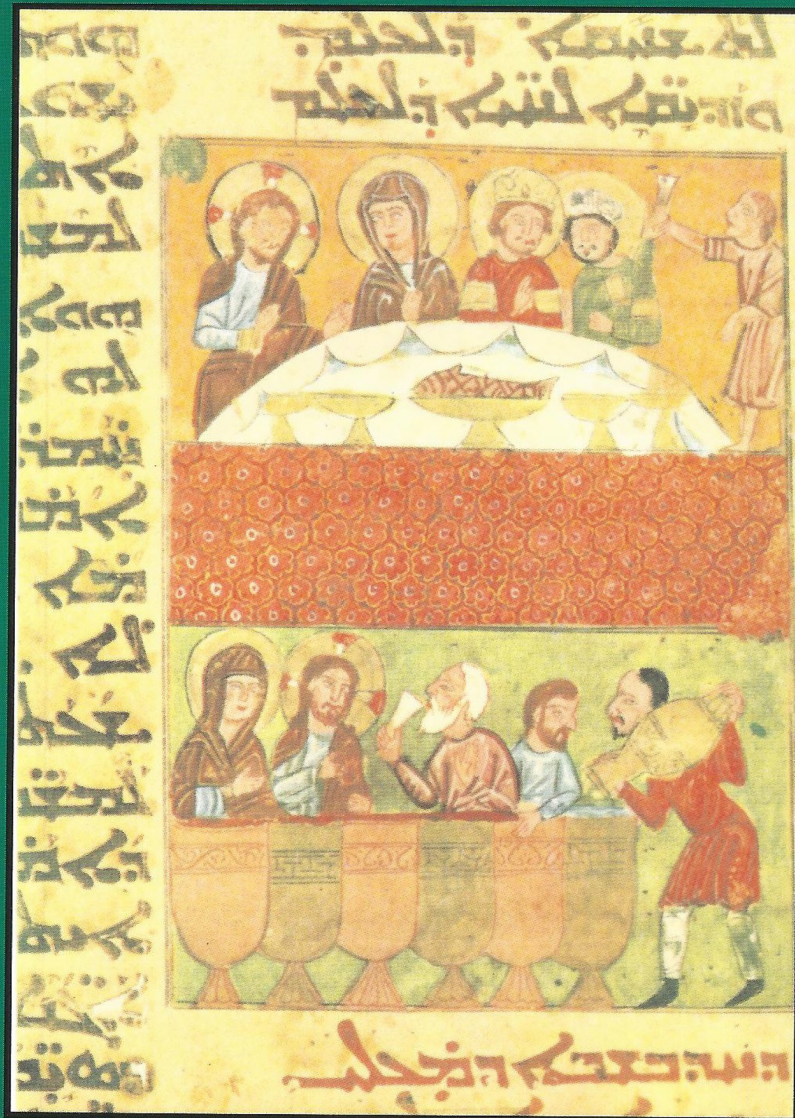


ARAMAIC GRAMMAR

Volume I



BY
Rev. Thomas Arayathinal

ARAMAIC GRAMMAR

(METHOD GASPEY - OTTO - SAUER)



BY

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INTRODUCTION



The language, of which this book presents an extensive grammar, is a very venerable one. In its oldest form it is found in inscriptions dating from the 9th (or even, perhaps, the 10th) century B. C., while the people who spoke it have been known with certainty from the 14th century B. C. Aramaic was soon written in the Phoenician alphabet and it was not a difficult language. These two factors made it spread from its mother country, the Syrian Desert and North-West Mesopotamia, to all the surrounding territories; there it became, if not the official language, at least the language of commerce and of international relations. In 702 B. C. the envoys of the Assyrian king Sennacherib were asked to speak Aramaic by the Jerusalem authorities who were on the walls of the besieged city. Aramaic became the official language of the old Persian empire of the Achaemenids, which extended from the Nile to the Indus valley under Darius I (521-485). In the time of Jesus, Aramaic dialects were spoken in Palestine; Aramaic words spoken by Him are recorded in the Gospels, and the Gospel itself was preached by Jesus in Aramaic.

Greek civilisation tried to supersede Aramaic in the large towns of Syria and Palestine. Its success was only temporary; in the country and in the towns farther inland, Aramaic remained the commonly spoken and even the official language. The alphabet in which it was written developed in the first centuries A. D. to a pure cursive one, and in this script the language comes again to light in the 3rd and 4th centuries A. D. in the region of Osrhoene, in North-West Mesopotamia. The dialect of Edessa, its famous capital, became the literary and liturgical language of the Aramaic Christians; most of them gave up their name "Aramaicans", and called themselves "Syrians" and their language

“Syriac” or “Syrian”, to distinguish themselves from the reputedly heathen “Aramaeans”.

Syriac had been for many centuries a spoken language in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, until it had to make way in most of these countries to Arabic, the language of Islam. As a living language it died out circa 800 A. D., although it is still used in the liturgy, and cognate dialects are still being spoken in some isolated villages of the Anti-Libanon and in North-West Mesopotamia.

Owing to the division of the territories where Syriac was a living language in an eastern part, which was for centuries under the dominion of the Persian Sassanids (3rd-7th century), and a western part dominated by the emperors of Greek Byzantium, who waged war against each other, two major Syriac dialects developed: East and West Syriac. Fundamentally they are one and the same language, the major difference being one of pronunciation.

At Present there are far fewer “Syrians” (western and eastern) in the ecclesiastical sense of the word than there used to be. The largest group are those of S. India, for whom this grammar is meant in the first place. The Indian Syriac communities are to be congratulated on having been given now such an extensive description and treatment of the Syriac grammar by the learned writer, the Reverend Father Thomas Arayathinal. He follows the famous grammars edited in Heidelberg according to the Gaspey-Otto-Sauer practical method. Those who have studied this grammar thoroughly, possess a key to the whole field of Syriac literature. This literature, the scientific study of which was much neglected during the last decades, is far from sufficiently known. With the revival of patristic studies, however, the general interest in old Syriac literature is increasing and it is more and more realised that many of its hidden treasures are still to be discovered. The venerable Syriac liturgy, especially of the eastern type, is perhaps the oldest and most venerable form

of Christian liturgy in existence. All this makes the study of Syriac language and literature so fascinating.

If it is used properly, this grammar will provide the student with an extensive practical knowledge of Syriac, which will be the writer's greatest reward. We pray that God may bless his magnificent work and give it every success.

Nijmegen Holland,
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