
Reviewed by Peter Freeouf, Chiang Mai University

In the Jewish and Christian traditions, Aramaic is of considerable importance among the Semitic languages in which the canonical texts of the traditions were originally composed. The three major varieties of Jewish and Christian Aramaic are: (i) Biblical Aramaic, the language of small portions of the Hebrew Bible (the books of Ezra and Daniel); (ii) Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, most prominently in the Babylonian Talmud; and (iii) Palestinian Jewish Aramaic (PJA), the language of the Palestinian or Jerusalem version of the Talmud and also of Midrashim and the Targums, Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, especially that of Onkelos.

Wm. B. Stevenson’s book is an exact reprint of a work that was first published by Oxford University Press in 1924. This short work is a concise summary of the main grammatical features of PJA. In the ‘Preface’ (3–5), S indicates that the audience of his grammar is first and foremost those with a knowledge of Hebrew or another Semitic language and who need an introduction to and overview of the language of the Aramaic portions of the Palestinian Talmud, the Midrashim, the Targums, and the Aramaic of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), the latter of which is very similar to PJA.

The book is divided into thirty-eight sections preceded by the ‘Preface’ setting out the author’s range of coverage, sources, and intended audience; a detailed ‘Table of contents’ (6–7); and a short bibliography, ‘Literature,’ citing only work published up to this edition of 1924. The first section, ‘Introduction’ (9–10), gives an outline of the character of the literary sources of PJA. The next section is ‘Orthography’ (11–15) and discusses in particular issues of vocalization of the extant texts in PJA. Pronominal and nominal morphology is treated in the next sections, three through fifteen (15–44). In the paradigmatic tables, variation in forms are given for the main textual sources of PJA, the Talmud, Midrashim, and the Targums of Onkelos, with some reference to the variants found in the Aramaic of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament).

The following sections, sixteen through thirty-eight (44–87), deal with the extensive verbal morphology. There is practically nothing on syntax or even examples that would allow for any extraction of syntactic information. Presumably, students’ use of texts written in this variety of Aramaic would serve this purpose. Finally, at the conclusion of the text there are several pages of verbal paradigms (88–96).

This is not a reference grammar but rather a concise supplementary outline of the major morphological features of this historically important variety of Aramaic. As such, it will be useful to students of the Hebrew Bible and other Aramaic scriptures as well as others interested in older Semitic languages.