

CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

Andreas Schuele, <i>An Introduction to Biblical Aramaic</i> (Edwin S. Payet) 123-125

An Introduction to Biblical Aramaic, by Andreas Schuele. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2012. Pp. xii + 145. ISBN-13: 978-0-664-23424-9. Softcover. US\$30.00

Schuele's book is the most recent study on Biblical Aramaic. His approach is quite different from Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Aramaic*, published in 2011. It stands more as a handbook where things are said, yet in a concise manner.

The publisher's regular price is \$30. The book however can be bought about half the original price. At the time I wrote this book review, the cheapest (new copy) in Amazon was \$15. The book also exists in kindle edition for \$14.65.

In size, it is the same as the revised edition of *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* of Alger F. Johns (1972). The content however is organized more like the book of Van Pelt or F. E. Greenspahn, *An Introduction to Aramaic*, 2nd ed. (2001). Schuele confesses to be "deeply indebted to Franz Rosenthal's seminal *Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* [7th ed.; 2006]" (p. ix), which he calls it to be his book's "big brother." In the *Introduction*, the author presents a concise access to biblical Aramaic compare to its "big brother" (p. ix).

It is mainly developed "from" and "for" a classroom setting (p. ix). Schuele presupposes that the one who wants to study Aramaic has "prior exposure to Biblical Hebrew" (p. ix). This can be seen through out the book. The abbreviations BA (biblical Aramaic), and BH (Biblical Hebrew) appear through the book. The author compares both languages when he feels necessary. He starts with the development of the specific phonemes in Aramaic compare to Hebrew (pp. 3ss.). He particularly highlights the differences between Aramaic and Hebrew vowels (pp. 17ss.). Similarly, a short comparative word list (Aramaic/Hebrew) of the most common Aramaic terms is provided (pp. 93-94). He also compares the Aramaic verbal system to the Hebrew one (pp. 40-41).

There is no chapter division but five main sections entitled "From the Phoenician to the Aramaic Writing System," "Masoretic Vowel Signs," "The Noun" (pp. 19-34), "The Verb" (pp. 35-62), and "Syntax" (pp. 63-83). The last three sections constitute the main part of the book. "The Noun" section could have been better titled as "Nominal Section" (or something of this kind) since it includes subsections on "adjectives," "prepositions," and "pronouns."

The verbs are first approached by "verbal inflections: Perfect, Imperfect, jussive and imperative." I have appreciated the complementarity between the paradigm (the final inflected form of the verb) and the structure tables (description of what consonant(s) have to be added to the root to obtain the paradigm table). Schuele then gives the basic verbal patterns in charts for each seven stems. I would have preferred charts for the 'weak verbs.' All the explanation stands in seven pages (pp. 54-60). Yet, as the author remarks, "due to the very limited number of BA texts, many of the verbal paradigms are incomplete. Especially for the so-called weak verbs, sometimes only a few examples are attested." (p. 41).

The syntax section is unique in its genre compare to Johns (1972), Greenspahn (2001), Van Pelt (2011). If Johns had some subsections entitled "uses of . . ." (perfect, imperfect, active participle, or passive participle), only Greenspahn had offered a separate section on syntax so far. Yet it had only two pages of explanations (pp.123-124). Schuele's section on syntax is therefore most welcome. Some may have preferred this section to be directly included in two previous sections ("The Noun," and "The Verb"). Yet, it has the merit to be concentrated in one place for learning, for reviewing, or for translating/researching.

The book includes a few sections such as short glossary of words to be learned ("Word List"), few "Persian and Greek Loanwords," and some "Idiomatic Expressions." Even it is not as much as Greenspahn's (2001), it has also three appendixes about some non-biblical Aramaic texts (i.e., the Zakkur inscription, some samples from Qumran). It concludes with the answers to the proposed exercises and a complete (?) Aramaic paradigm for every existing tense and stem of the Bible (pp.120-145). Since Schuele does not separate the regular verbs from the weak verbs for each person/number, it may not seem friendly at first sight. The logic of it however stands, particularly while comparing/learning particular verbal forms. This is also the intention of the author.

Schuele has come up with a fine, concise and 'user-friendly' book to study biblical Aramaic. The language used is of a pleasant and 'lecturing' style. Some particular points have caught my attention: all examples and exercises are directly taken from the Bible. If it is designed for a classroom setting, no distinctive vocabulary subsection is provided. A simple

exercise accompanies each subsection. One may sometimes think it is not enough, compare to the exercises provided by Greenspahn (2001) and by Van Pelt (2011). And in that sense, it may be difficult for a student who studies Aramaic for the first time. I have a 'slight' problem with the Aramaic font size used. For me who already wear glasses, it is too small! Yet, the book of Schuele is an excellent resource for students who know Hebrew, or who are eager to learn. His concise approach is much welcome.

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