Syriac Language ܠܹܫܵܢܵܐ ܣܘܼܪܝܵܝܵܐ
Syriac 1
CH 3P1071/ TH 3P1101/ OT 3P1111/ NT 3P1151
McMaster Divinity College
Fall 2025
Thursday, 4:00–5:50 pm
Fyfe Room
Instructor: Dr. Haitham Issak
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Course Description:

Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic and one of the oldest languages in the Middle East. Historically, it has functioned as a language of communication for religion, literature, and history. It has been and continues to be used in various churches as a liturgical language. This course is the first to concentrate on learning the Syriac language from the ground up. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to read, write, and translate classical Syriac using a dictionary.

Course Objectives:

Knowing:

- Exploring Syriac Christianity and its influence on the early development of Christian theology and spirituality within the Church.
- One can discover many significant writers and appreciate the contributions of early Syriac Church authors.

Being:

- Explore the Peshitta's language to examine the Old and New Testaments and the writings of Syriac authors. Additionally, broaden your understanding to fully experience the Lord's Word while serving society, glorifying the Lord, and grasping the true meaning of Scripture.

Doing:

- Enhance every student's skill to read, translate, and understand texts written in Syriac.
- The aim is to empower students to analyze texts written exclusively in Syriac by Syriac authors, including Aphrahat, Ephrem, Jacob of Serug, and others.

Required Books:

Dictionary:
- Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903.

Grammar:
- George, Kiraz. *The New Syriac Primer*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013.

Method:

Instructor's presentation:
The instructor will introduce new material to the class, including grammar, vocabulary, and readings.

Reading and discussion:
Students should be ready to engage in class activities crucial for reading, translation, vocabulary development, answering questions, and completing exercises.

Grading:
- Class participation: 20%
- Homework exercises: 20%
- Midterm exam: 25%
- Final exam: 35%

Course Schedule:

September 11 ܐܠܦ
- Introduction: Course Outline
- The Alphabet: ܐܠܦ ܒܝܬ

September 18
- Vowels ܙܘܥܐ
- The ܒܓܕ letters
- The formation of words and sentences

September 25
- Gender: Masculine and Feminine ܕܟܪܐ ܘܢܩܒܬܐ
- Gender with verbs
- Gender with adjectives

October 2 ܐܢܫ ܡܕܡ
- Gender with body parts
- Gender with numerals
- Gender with pronouns

October 9
- Numbers: ܡܢܝܢܐ
- Numbers with verbs
- Numbers and adjectives
- Midterm exam

October 13–17: Reading Week – No Class

October 23
- Verbs tense ܡܚܕܐ
- The past tense ܐܚܐ ܘܚܟܪ
- The present tense ܐܚܐ ܘܩܐܡ
- The future tense ܐܚܐ ܘܚܕܡ
- Imperative ܦܘܩܕܢܐ

October 30
- Verbs Conjugation

November 6 ܐܚܢܒ ܐܣܝܪ
- Passive verbs beginning with ܐܬ
- Verbs types ܐܦܥܠ ,ܦܥܠ, ܦܥܠ

November 13
- Prefixes and Suffixes
- Possessive suffixes
- Objects pronouns suffixes

November 20
- Pronouns: ܣܘܡܚܐ
- Conjugation: Feminine pronouns ܣܘܡܚܐ ܢܩܕܢܬܐ
- Conjugation: Masculine pronouns ܣܘܡܚܐ ܘܕܟܪܢܐ

November 27
- Conjugation of ܗܘܐ and ܐܝܬ
- The word ܟܠ
- Estrangelo & East Syriac

December 4 ܟܠ ܝ ܡܙܡ
- Greeting ܫܠܡܐ
- Time ܐܚܐ
- Days of the week ܝܘܡܬܐ ܘܫܘܥܐ
- The seasons ܩܬܣܟܐ
- The months ܝܪܚܐ
- Frequently used verbs ܡܚܐ ܗܝܝܢܐ ܣܡܣܪܐ

December 11
- Final exam

Other Syriac Resources:

Dictionaries:
- Sebastian P. Brock, and George A. Kiraz. *Syriac-English Dictionary*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017.
- Costaz, Louis. *Syriac-English Dictionary*. Beyrouth, Leban: Dar El-Machreq, 1963.

Grammars:
- John F. Healey. *Leshono Suryoyo: First Studies in Syriac*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005.
- J.F. Coakley, *Robinson's Paradigms and Exercises in Syriac Grammar* (6th ed.). Clarendon: Oxford University Press, (2013).

Online dictionary:
- https://www.syriacdictionary.net

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production, including AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

A special note about AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

AODA:
In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary

accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

Illness Policy

If a student cannot attend class due to illness, please do not hesitate to contact the instructor, and if you are contagious, please refrain from attending class. The absent student will receive a summary of the material covered in that class to ensure they do not miss any important information. If the instructor feels unwell, the class may be conducted via livestreaming (Zoom) instead of in-person attendance.

The Inclement Weather

On a snow day when the university is closed, classes and exams will be cancelled and rescheduled. Assignments due on that day will be postponed. If it is possible to conduct class on Zoom during a snow day, we will proceed with that.

Bookstore

All required and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Highly Recommended for Online (Asynchronous) Courses
– Presence and Meaningful Participation
Presence and participation in this course are expected. Faculty know from many years of experience that a student's level of presence and participation in the course will impact how well she or he will score in the course. Although there are exceptions to this rule of thumb, low levels of presence and participation tend to translate to low grades; mediocre presence and participation tend to translate to mediocre grades; and high levels of presence and participation tend to translate to higher grades.

A word needs to be said about what constitutes "presence" (attendance) and "participation" in an asynchronous course. Students must establish a record of participation in academically related activities to meet the expected level of attendance and meaningful participation. Be aware that merely logging into the online class is not, by itself, sufficient as a demonstration of attendance and participation by the student. "Academically related activities" certainly includes participation in and completion of the course requirements that are described below. Additionally, just as students are expected to engage with the course content/materials throughout the week outside of the learning management system (A2L), so also students are expected to engage one another in formative dialogue "outside of class." This is an important part of belonging to and maintaining a community of learning and is a staple ingredient in what constitutes "presence."

– Online Etiquette

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for classmates and the instructor. This is even truer in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that we use to interpret what a person is communicating to us are not present online (except, perhaps in video posts). Therefore, it is especially critical that we be mindful of how our words will be interpreted by those who are reading them. As the instructor of the course, it is my responsibility to monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing their views in a respectful manner. Most if not all courses at MDC are devoted to the interpretation of Scripture. Invariably there will be disagreements; these disagreements must be discussed and negotiated in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course. The instructor will expect that you will give some thought to your postings. Excessive postings are also frowned upon because these amount to dominating the discussion. Please limit your postings to less than 200 words. Instructors reserve the right to ask students to take a step back to allow others discussion time if she or he feels that an individual is dominating the discussion. In your responses, please try to be clear which point your response refers to. Students who violate these guidelines may be dismissed from class.

Note: This syllabus belongs to the instructor and has been prepared using the information currently available. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions until the first day of class.