

Cook, Edward. *Biblical Aramaic and Related Dialects: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 415, GBP 125, ISBN 9781108494366

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Ed Cook’s superb work on Aramaic from “the second half of the first millennium BCE and the first century CE” (p. 1), as an “introductory grammar,” intends to “bring students to a reading knowledge of these important texts, as well as others written in the same dialects, and enable them to move forward, well equipped, to more advanced study.” (p. ix) The modest title (*Biblical Aramaic and Related Dialects: An Introduction*; hereafter *BARD*) does not do justice to the scope of the book; the back cover blurbs are more to the point (“a comprehensive view of ancient Aramaic”; “most up-to-date description of Aramaic,” etc.). Cook scatters erudite interpretations (e.g., Dan 6:8 [MT 9], § 401b; 6:16 [MT 17], p. 293) and emendations of biblical (e.g., Ezra 5:4, p. 321) and non-biblical texts (e.g., 1QapGen 22:31, § 173; Ahiqar proverb 126, p. 341) into the grammar and chrestomathy; not only students but seasoned scholars, translators, etc. will want to scour the work for important insights into the transmission and interpretation of these texts. Despite minor errors that a second edition could easily improve, *BARD* beautifully inducts students into Aramaic in its own right—not merely as a handmaid to Hebrew—by describing the Aramaic of Scripture alongside parallel dialects.

Following a substantial first chapter which details the spread and diachronic development of Aramaic (§§ 1–18) and lists important resources for research (§ 19), chs. 2–17 (§§ 20–435) cover all the orthographic, phonological, morphosyntactic, and verbal-semantic aspects one would expect in a fully-fledged grammar. Using Cook’s classifications and abbreviations, the dialects he consistently describes include Imperial Aramaic (IA), Biblical Aramaic (BA), and Qumran Aramaic (QA). Although BA constitutes the Aramaic of Ezra and Daniel, Cook views Ezra as overlapping in large measure with IA and Daniel with QA (§§ 9–14). The student of the targumim will be interested in how Cook uses Jewish Literary Aramaic (JLA, i.e., Targum Onqelos and Targum Jonathan) to shed light on the morphology of the other dialects (§ 18 et *passim*). Cook concludes the work with a 90-page reading guide (ch. 18) keyed to the preceding chapters, followed by appendices, glossaries, a bibliography, and indices that increase the work’s functionality.

Considering *BARD* as a textbook, a doctoral seminar could cover the material in a hefty single course, but I suspect graduate level students would require two terms—especially if no prior background in linguistics or Hebrew is required. Given that this

book is intended to facilitate the learning of the Aramaic inductively, teachers must inquire, *Were instructors to assign portions of the guided reading throughout a course term or two, would the cued sections expose students to the entirety of chs. 1–17?* Cook offers no clarification. Having tallied the references to the 435 sections myself, it would seem that students who work through ch. 18 and read through all the sections Cook specifies will not have read the following: §§ 1–13, 15–16, 19–20, 34–35, 36b, c, 37, 41, 49a, b, d, e, 50a, 52a, b, 54a, 55, 58e–g, 59, 60a, c, 80, 91a, c, 118, 123, 133a, c, 134, 137, 139b, 140–141, 144, 147a, c, 154a, 158a, 165a, c, 169a, 170–71, 174, 175ab, 177a, e, g, h, 178b, d, e, 179a, c, d, g, 180, 183b, 184a, 186, 187a, c, e, 195–196, 198, 202, 205–206, 221, 226, 231a, d, 234a, 241b, d–f, 243–245, 246b, c, 247, 250b, c, e, f, 251c, e, f, 255, 256d, f, 270, 278, 281b, e, 282, 285a, 286, 289–90, 291c, 292–294, 300, 302a, d, 306, 312, 315, 316a, 317b–d, 318a, 319, 321c, 329, 331c, 332, 333a, 335–338, 339b, d, 342c, 343, 345–346, 347b, 348, 350f, h, 351b, 352c–e, 353–354, 361, 363–364, 365a–e, h, 367–368, 371, 374, 382, 385, 387a, b, 389, 392, 393b, c, g, 397–401, 403, 407, 408b, c, 411–412, 416–417, 422d, 424–425, 426a, 428c–e, 429.

Neglecting to incorporate such a large swath of the grammar makes me wonder whether Cook expects students to have read the entire grammar before undertaking the guided reading. This would defeat the purpose of inductive exposure, but it could explain the chrestomathy’s repeated encouragements to “review” sections Cook actually mentions for the first time: §§ 52c (Dan 3:29, p. 285), 256a (6:4, p. 287), 313b (6:11, p. 291), 256c (6:17, p. 292), 258a (4:8, p. 300), 259a (4:14, p. 303), 54b (4:31, p. 309), 173 (7:7, p. 313), 154c (Ezra 5:7, p. 322) 265 (5:15, p. 324), 231e (TAD A4.7 ll. 7–8, p. 328), 258 (Ahiqar proverb 80, p. 339, where thus far we have encountered only § 258a). Those using *BARD* for teaching might wish to supplement its otherwise excellent chrestomathy by assigning these omitted portions of the grammar as additional required reading. A future edition of the work might incorporate these omitted sections into the guided readings, even when not directly prerequisite for comprehending the text at hand.

Cook predictably displays a fulsome knowledge of Aramaic and general linguistics, incorporating technical linguistic nomenclature not typically encountered in Aramaic introductions alongside heuristic aids from his decades of instructing (e.g., *ayin* pronounced as “a ‘gulping’ interruption,” § 24; phonological secondary opening as “‘echo’ vowels,” § 76a et al.; a resumptive pronoun as a “‘shadow’ pronoun,” § 148b). And yet, Cook sagaciously retains some less-than-ideal but accepted terms (e.g., “ethical dative,” § 336; “left-dislocation” for right-to-left languages, § 369). The grammar dives straight into contested topics like TAM (ch. 11 et al.), valence (§§ 323–323), *Aktionsart* (§ 328), and middle voice (§§ 327, 333); one may wish to quibble with Cook’s positions, but he is to be congratulated for introducing students to these vital categories. Even experienced readers may feel themselves drowning at times, but I see the expansiveness as a strength of *BARD*. I appreciate his handy abbreviations for the *binyanim* and foresee appropriating them myself (see §§ 208, 236, 276). Still, he does not always use relevant terminology where one might expect; rather than, for example, saying that *qVtl* noun formations with originally geminate consonant clusters “(**qVll*) simplify (undouble) the final consonant when no suffixes follow” word-finally, it might be preferable to say that

the final consonant *deletes* (§ 104; further, CATAPHORIC PRONOUN would be appropriate to § 162a and NON-CONCATENATIVE MORPHOLOGY to ch. 10).

Throughout *BARD*, one occasionally encounters problems with Cook's exemplification and explanation. This is the case in §§ 64f (with the preposition קדם appearing as an example in a subsection dealing with “short *u* ... on a guttural at the onset of an open unstressed syllable”), 116b (בר וברה אחרנן from B2 3:10 is not an example of disagreement in determination in IA, seeing that בר וברה is undetermined), 146a (no example of a plural demonstrative pronoun *preceding* a definite head noun is given; include, e.g., אֵלֶּה קְאָנִיָּא in Ezra 5:15), 164h (no example with a number higher than 1000 is illustrated, and the mathematical formula could be unduly taxing for some), 279g (no transparent instance of gemination is listed due to gutturals involving competing phonological processes), 291c (where volitives “not hav[ing] truth-value” is not explained to readers). On a related subject, one might wish to see brief explanatory comments in § 14—where Cook introduces IQapGen and IIQtgJob (better designated IIQarJob; cf. p. 351)—about the evidentiary value of translations in describing Aramaic. Cook is certainly aware that translation interference could result in atypical Aramaic, as he signals this to his readers in, e.g., §§ 169d, 302c, 397, 412, 422e, 432, though not in, e.g., §§ 169b, 359b, 365c, d, 419. It may well be that Cook views translated materials as deserving of incorporation equal to compositions in their own right; I would be glad to know his opinion but unprepared to assume his thoughts. This is a subject over which much more ink has been spilt in Septuagint Studies.

Aside from the specific matter of exemplification, I would like to register some less thematic “quibbles” in order of appearance: (§ 7) In discussing the unknown setting of rediscovery for the Asharma, Bactrian, and Amherst documents, “provenience” rather than “provenance” seems to be the desirable word. (§ 241f and p. 321; cf. § 45b) Cook appears too ready to emend Dan 2:9 and Ezra 5:4 where both texts involve total assimilation of phonemes in an environment of shared place features. Expanding the dataset to Targum Onqelos at Num 23:9, the tG form יִדְּנֹן likewise has total assimilation (ת > ד), though each letter is written separately. Such assimilation is not typical (the majority of targum mss in this case also prefer יִתְדְּנֹן), but we could multiply illustrations. Might there be sufficient examples to show that we need not dismiss the anomalies as errors? (§ 245) Discussing I-²aleph roots, I would exclude “C stem suffix conjugation” verbs from the category of “forms without prefixes” (cf. § 248b). (§ 269) The examples demonstrating the presence or absence of consonantal III-aleph are not organized as they normally are, which results in unintended impressions (e.g., that תתמלא is G stem). (§ 333b) The description of “T stem middle voice verbs” only involving a “change of state without causation by an agent” requires exception, given the first example: “קום ‘remain alive, endure’ (tD).” The semantics do not entail someone (or -thing) who *was not* alive *becoming* alive, but rather someone who *was* alive *staying* alive. Thus, we might say that a “change of state” is typical, yet *continuance in a state* is an additional nuance (cf. §§ 328, 331b). (§ 353) It seems misleading to assert categorically, “The subject [of a clause] is always a noun or noun phrase, or a verbal element used as a noun.” I think one might better yet say, “The subject may consist of a noun (phrase), independent pronoun

(phrase), substantival adjective (phrase), or simply be marked by a verbal inflectional affix(es).” (§ 359) The section begins with the statement, “With transitive verbs, objects are obligatory constituents in a clause.” No doubt this is true with semantic valence, but not necessarily with syntactic valence, as an example like *אֶכְלָה וּמִדְּקָה* in Dan 7:7 proves (cf. pp. 312–13). (p. 286) One might note a caveat for verbs undergoing metathesis (as with *אֶשְׁתַּנּוּ*, Dan 3:19) when claiming that “[t]he tD stem, unlike the tG, will always have a full vowel *a* or *ā* following the first root letter.” (p. 305) I was, simply put, confused by the following statement: “The expected form is *רְבִית* / *רְבִית*, both agreeing with the Ketiv.” Which is the expected form? And is *רְבִית* expected as the form of the Ketiv, and *רְבִית* as the Qere? (p. 342) It is stated, “The whole [138th] proverb [of Ahiqar] is a left-dislocated construction.” But is it not rather the entire first *line* that is left-dislocated?

As it would be nigh impossible to catch all the typos in a book of this sort, I record here some corrections that I hope the author will appreciate: “Kaufman and Steven” vs. “abd” (xi); “*לְמַעַבְד* *ləmēbād*” vs. “*mēbād*” (§ 75b); “and *ū* and *ī* from **ūt* and **it*” vs. “and *ī*” (§ 88c); “which continue to be the cstr. forms.” vs. “which continue to be the cstr. forms. *ī*.” (§ 88c); “*məhaqṭil/məhaqṭel*” vs. “*məhaqṭil/mehaqṭel*” (§ 234a); “participle ms cstr. *מְהַנְזֶקֶת*” vs. “msc” (§ 254); “**mitqaṭil*” vs. “**mitqaṭil*” (§ 240a); “see X Y-ing” vs. “see X Y-ing” (§ 340b); “שִׁים ‘give, put, place’” vs. “שִׁים” (p. 273); “*וְאַתּוֹנָא*” vs. “*וְאַתּוֹנָא*” (p. 280); “*הֶרְגֵּשׁוּ*” vs. “*הֶרְגֵּשׁוּ*” (p. 289); “*אַשְׁתּוּמָם*” vs. “*אַשְׁתּוּמָם*” (p. 304*tris*); “*וּלְמַן דִּי יִצְבָּא*” vs. “*וּלְמַן דִּי יִצְבָּא*” (p. 306); “*הֶתְקַנְתָּ* *ḥetqənét*” vs. “*הֶתְקַנְתָּ*” (p. 310); “*רֵאשׁ*” vs. “*רֵאשׁ*” (p. 310); “*רֵבְבָן*” vs. “*רֵבְבָן*” (p. 315, with extra *ī*). Without individually enumerating, spirantization is not reflected in the transcription of fricatives in dozens of instances. Inadvertently (with the exception of § 55a), it seems Cook never represents spirantization when BA words begin with spirantized plosives (e.g., “*כַּשְׁדָּאִי*” *kašdāʾī* should be *kašdāʾī*, § 49b; “*תֵּרֹא*” *tēroaʾ* should be *tēroaʾ*, § 76c, etc.). Best noted here are several debatable translations: *פרשגן כתב מלי חזות עמרם* might better be translated as “a copy of the book of the words of [the vision of] Amram” (§ 371); “*כל זי איתי לה*” as “all that that there is to him (= all that he has)” vs. “all that that there is to me (= all that I have)” (§ 380d; emphasis original, though one might wonder if the emphasis is misplaced throughout this section); “*לא הות לדרגמן זילי הא אנה*” as “it was not Dargaman’s land—my (land); see, I (am Dargaman)” vs. “it was not land of Dargaman (that is), mine, *that’s me*” (§ 383, although the Aramaic is undoubtedly choppy!); “*וכעת ארה ספר לה שלחתי*” as “now, look, you have not sent [him] a letter” (§ 385b). Though not a typo, we are told *passim* to refer to the appendices in the back for the “complete reconstruction” of verbal paradigms. It is disappointing for the student to find multiple appendices with “etc.” and blank spaces when (s)he is looking for a quick answer, including when the Aramaic data is extant and reconstruction is not hypothetical (similarly, Table 9, p. 106).

As for typesetting, the light grey font for examples and the chrestomathy makes for tiresome reading; the grey background with black font used elsewhere would be preferable. Some unexpected features include multiple Syriac fonts (cf. §§ 58c, 282c, 391e); the table’s second column lacking *hireq*, i.e., *ī* in § 90d; “silver” in bold font in the table in § 103; extra space in “*מְלִכּוֹ תָא*” (Dan 4:26, § 160c); sections skipping from § 187c to e (thus, no d); superfluous dashes representing consonants when coupled

with ◌ in §§ 212–213; and offset *niqqudot* throughout the entirety of ch. 6. It could be a problem purely unique to me, but I stumbled for quite some time over the use of “Cp.” for “compare” and “Cp” for “causative passive” (e.g., “אשכח: Cp. הִשְׁכַּחַו,” p. 348) when I forgot the all-important difference between the period and its absence. For the new student, it may be profitable to explain conventions of using *qtl* to describe derivational patterns alongside the standard C (= “consonant”) and V (= “vowel”) abbreviations found in phonological descriptions, as in §§ 57, 78. Thus, in § 117, “**mV*–” means nouns formed with *mem* and vowel prefixed to the root but “–*VI* (short vowel plus consonant)” does not mean nouns ending in *lamed* any consonant.

In conclusion, *BARD* deserves to be not only the go-to introduction but reference grammar for Aramaic of its period. My suggestions could, I hope, improve its already outstanding quality by enhancing its utility, clarity, accuracy. I hope a second edition appears before my copy בִּלְה!