AN INTRODUCTION
TO
SYRIAC STUDIES

Fr. Emmanuel Thelly C.M.I.
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Introduction to Syriac Studies.
(Mini Syriac Grammar)

This booklet is just an introduction to Syriac studies. The Grammar of Fr. Gabriel (1922) of Fr. Ludovic (1951); of Fr. Jerome (1944) and mine (1961) as well as the erudite grammar of Rev. Fr. Thomas Arayathinal (1957, 1959); of Mar Aprem (1981) etc. are there for scholars or those interested in further studies. Rev. Dr. Thomas Koonammakkal was behind the making of these notes.

The languages of the world can be divided into five main families: The Aryan (Indo-European); Semitic, Mongolian, Dravidian, and the Negroid. Hebrew, Aramaic (Syriac), Assyrian, Arabic etc. are of the Semetic family.

Aramaic/Syriac is one of the oldest of languages; and hence very simple. Our Lord Jesus Christ and his mother, Bl. Virgin Mary and the Apostles spoke the same. Some parts of the Old Testament, and the Gospel of St. Mathew were originally written in Syriac.

European scholars use either the Chaldean or Western pronunciation. No one is faithful to our ancient Indian tradition. Even in the Assyrian Church of the East (Trichur) they pronounce many words and some vowels like the westerners, probably from the influence of those Jacobite priests who helped them to translate their liturgical books. As to their pronunciation of certain words the influence of some modern Middle Eastern Syriac teachers as well may not be denied.

Fr. Emmanuel Thelly C.M.I.
There are only twenty two letters in this language; namely. They are written and read from the right to the left. All letters start from the line. They can be written continuously but for a few, namely. Some have hard and soft pronunciations, namely. The hard sound is called Kusaya and the soft sound Rukaka. The Syro-Malabarians add the sound of when are doubled.

The pronunciation and numerical value of the consonants:

1 $\text{a} = (\text{ابل})$
2 $\text{b} = (\text{ba})$
3 $\text{g} = (\text{مل})$
4 $\text{dh} = (\text{بد})$
5 $\text{h} = (\text{ب})$
6 $\text{v} = (\text{ب})$
7 $\text{z} = (\text{ب})$
8 $\text{ch} = (\text{ب})$
9 $\text{th} = (\text{ب})$
10 $\text{i} = (\text{ب})$
20 $\text{k} = (\text{ب})$
30 $\text{l} = (\text{ب})$
40 $\text{m} = (\text{ب})$
50 $\text{n} = (\text{ب})$
60 $\text{s} = (\text{ب})$
70 $\text{a} = (\text{ب})$
80 $\text{p} = (\text{ب})$
90 $\text{q} = (\text{ب})$
100 $\text{r} = (\text{ب})$
200 $\text{s} = (\text{ب})$
300 $\text{sh} = (\text{ب})$
400 $\text{th} = (\text{ب})$

The vowels are expressed by certain dots above or below the letters with or without certain consonants.

The vowels are: These letters are not joined to the following letter nor do they touch each other.

There are no doubled letters in Syriac. But we pronounce some letters doubled, under certain conditions and this mode of pronunciation is called Doubling.

Similarly, we pronounce two letters as one under certain particular situations and is called Assimilation.
The Personal Pronouns:

- They: ﷲ
- She: ﷲ
- He: ﷲ

Of the third person:
- You (pl.): ﷲ
- You (sing.): ﷲ

Of the second person:
- We: ﷲ
- I: ﷲ

The personal pronouns can be used as verb to be in the present tense agreeing with the subject in gender number and person. eg. (You are Joseph).

Note: 1) When they are used as verbs the ﷲ of ﷲ and the ﷲ of ﷲ are occulted (marked by a small line above and are not pronounced). eg. ﷲ (I am Jesus) (He is Mathew)

Note 2) When ﷲ is joined to ﷲ the second ﷲ is changed into ﷲ (yod) and becomes ﷲ. eg.

The verbal form used alone can show the subject also. ﷲ (You are Thomas) ﷲ I am Joseph. ﷲ I am Mathew.

The third person plurals used as verbs are ﷲ eg. ﷲ. Rem.1) As pronouns they are used in the accusative case.

2) ﷲ and ﷲ are usually fused together as ﷲ.

The personal pronouns can be declined thus (though scientifically they are combined with some particles/prepositions). eg. ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ 

The enclitic form of the personal pronouns are called inseparable pronouns. They are grouped into different sets to be added to nouns verbs and particles. The first group added to nouns ending in ﷲ can easily be derived from the declension of the personal pronouns.

They are ﷲ

(The other groups can be formed/learned from these.)
VERBS.

Syriac verbs have triliteral roots = i.e. of three letters and they are called radicals. The root of a verb is its 3rd pers. m. s. of the past/perfect tense. (In some roots all the three radicals may not be expressed.)

The verbs have only one conjugation and the different forms are obtained by the prefixing or suffixing or both (of a letter or letters). The different forms of the past tense can be derived for the most part by adding the endings of the pers. pronouns.

Note: *א, א, א* are called weak letters and their presence - whether in the beginning, middle or end of a root causes some changes in the conjugation. Some verbs may have two or more of their radicals weak letters.) Our typical verb is *א א א* (he wrote) wherein all the three radicals are subject to hard and soft pronunciation.

Perfect/past tense:

3 p. m. s. he wrote
3 p. f. s. she wrote
2 p.m.s. you wrote
2 p.f.s. you wrote
1 p.c. I wrote

3 p.m.pl. They wrote

do f.pl. " "

2 p. m.pl. You wrote
do f. " "

1 c. pl. We wrote.

Imperative. (second person only)

m. s. (you) Write
F. s. " "
m. pl. " "
F.pl. " "

Future tense (from the imperative).

3 p. m.'s. He will (shall) write.  א א א
3 p. f. s. She " " א א א
2 p. m. s. You " " א א א
2 p. f. s. """
1 p. c. s. """
3 p. m. pl. They ""
3 p. f. pl. """
2 p. m. pl. You ""
2 p. f. pl. """
1 p. c. pl. We will ""

Infinitive (from the root)
To write — كيَجفف‌ب كم
To write — كيَجفف‌ب كم

Participles (active/present)
m. s. writing. — كيَجفف‌ب
f. s. """

m. pl. """
f. pl. ""

Past/Passive participles.
m. s. Written — حَبَب
f. s. """

m. pl. """
f. pl. """

كَيَجفف‌ب كيَجفف‌ب كيَجفف‌ب كيَجفف‌ب كيَجفف‌ب كيَجفف‌ب كيَجفف‌ب كيَجفف‌ب كيَجفف‌ب
Note: 1) When a suffix beginning with a vowel is added to a verb, it loses its vowel.

2) Derivatives/causatives are formed by the addition of vowels, letters or both.

3) Passives are formed by prefixing ٍّ. The place of ٌ of the prefix is taken by the regular prefix in the conjugation (as in the ٌ of the second derivatives.)

4) The first and second derivatives have their imperative like the 3rd p. m.s. of their perfect tense; but the third radical weak verbs differ.

5) The infinitives of derivatives and passives end in ٍّ.

6) The difference between the active and passive participles is that the active has ٍّ on its second radical and the passive has the vowel ُّ on its second radical.

Prefix to the first group of inseparable pronouns (but for the 3p. m. & s.) brings us to the second group (of insep.pron.) which are added to the pl. nouns ending in ٍّ or ّْ.

They are:

Added to

When the second and third radicals of a root are the same letters, we find that only one will be expressed there and the regular vowel of the second letter will be given to the first. (The suppressed letter will be expressed in the course of inflection/conjugation). Our model verb for the same is ِّّّ he cheated/injured.
When the second radical of a root is a weak letter, it is not usually expressed, and its vowel is given to the first radical and it becomes long, eg. ُنَفَّذَ (نَفَّذَ) he spent the night/lodged. (In the course of inflection the weak letters ُء ُء ُء interchange.)
Imperative:

خیم
خیم
خیم
خیم
خیم
Future:

خیم
خیم
خیم
خیم
خیم
خیم
خیم
خیم
Infinitive:

خیم، خیمه
Active Part.:
خیم خیمه خیمه
Pass. part.:
خیم خیمه خیمه

Note: The first derivatives of these two model roots are quite regular as the three radicals are present.

The third group of inseparable pronouns. (This can be formed for the most part, from the first group by prefixing خیم but for the first p.s.):

خیم خیم خیم خیم خیم خیم خیم خیم خیم

Note: When the first p. s. suffix is added, the short vowel of the first letter is changed into long:
Compound (periphrastic) tenses.
The present/present continuous tense is formed by adding/suffixing personal pronouns (enclitics) to the present/active participles agreeing in gender and number. (but for the third person, unless for giving stress). eg.

He writes/he is writing)
She " "
You write/you are writing.
I (m.) write/I am writing.
I (f) " " ()
They "/they are writing"
"(f) " " .
You " you " " ( )
"(f.pl) write/are "
We write/We are writing.

The passive present tense is formed in the same way i.e. by adding personal pronouns to the past/passive participles, agreeing in gender and number. eg.

It (he) is written.
" (she) " "
You are written.
"(f) " " .
I am written.
I(f) " 

The past imperfect tense is formed by conjugating " with the present participles (with occulted ُ), agreeing in gender number and person. eg.

He was writing.
She was writing
you (m) were writing
you (f) were writing
I (m) was writing.
I (f) was writing.
They (m) were writing.
They (f) were writing.
You (m) were writing.
You (f) were writing.
We (m) were writing.
We (f) were writing.

The past perfect (pluperfect) tense is formed by conjugating both the principal verb and their perfect tenses. Here too will be occulted. eg He had written. 
She had written. 
you (m) had written. 
You (f) had written. 
I had written. 

The first derivative of its imperative; its fut. its inf. its Act. part. ; its Pass. part.
The second derivative of the same is . Verbs like become. Its second derivative too loses its second radical and becomes. Verbs like become. Its second derivative becomes.

The passives are formed by prefixing to the corresponding active with some changes of vowels and consonants. The letter Alap (a) is replaced by the proper prefixes of the tenses.

The third class has no passive in the primitive; so, the second der. passive is used instead.
There are other derivatives (first der. B, group) formed by using servile letters: prefixing, suffixing, inserting, repeating etc. which are, so to say, regular in conjugation, but have an extra letter (letters) which remains always (as if bracketed) in all forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imp.</td>
<td>מְתַקֵּדָהּ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fut.</td>
<td>מְתַקֵּדָהּ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inf.</td>
<td>מְתַקֵּדָהּ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act. Part.</td>
<td>מְתַקֵּדָהּ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass. Part.</td>
<td>מְתַקֵּדָהּ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Syriac, a single word can be a complete sentence with a subject, predicate or finite verb and an object (personal). eg. he saved/redeemed me. מְתַקֵּדָהּ. he killed him. מְתַקֵּדָהּ. crucify him. מְתַקֵּדָהּ.

The inseparable pronouns/pronominal suffixes added to verbs facilitate this process. They are arranged into six groups (though they are essentially the same as the three groups added to nouns.) This is to help us to distinguish the verbal forms and meaning. The third person plurals מְתַקֵּדָהּ are not added to verbs but the separable pronouns מְתַקֵּדָהּ are used instead. מְתַקֵּדָהּ. I called them.

Note: 1) The first group of inseparable pronouns added to verbs are the same as the first group added to nouns ending in מְתַקֵּדָהּ but for the 1st p. s.

2) Similarly the 3rd group but for the 3. p. m. s. is the same with מְתַקֵּדָהּ prefixed to the 1st group.

3) The 5th group, but for the 1st p.s. is the same as the 3rd group suffixed to nouns מְתַקֵּדָהּ and the like.

4) Similarly the 6th group is the same as the 3rd group devoid of the first vowel מְתַקֵּדָהּ and 6th b) is the same as the 5th group devoid of the 1st vowel מְתַקֵּדָהּ.

5) The 1st and 2nd p. s. & pl. do not admit the suffixes of the respective persons; instead of them one of מְתַקֵּדָהּ inflected with pronominal suffixes is used. eg.
The present tense does not take any suffix; the separable pronouns are used instead.

Similarly, the 1st p. pl. in double nun \( \text{\textdagger} \) and the 1st form of the infinitive, do not take suffixes.

Nouns.

In respect of origin, (within the language) nouns are either primitives or derivatives. Primitives are those which express primary notions necessary for social life, as \( \text{\textdagger} \) father.

Derivatives are those which are formed from other words as \( \text{\textdagger} \) (from \( \text{\textdagger} \))

Note: It is the proper mark of Syriac nouns that they end in \( \text{\textdagger} \) which is not a consonant but a concomitant of the vowel.

Nouns can be derived in various forms from the same stem/root signifying different aspects of the meaning implied in it: a) by a change of vowels as \( \text{\textdagger} \) holiness; \( \text{\textdagger} \) writing, \( \text{\textdagger} \) redeemer, etc. \( \text{\textdagger} \) bright light/flash of light.

b) By elision or repetition of radicals \( \text{\textdagger} \) sleep from \( \text{\textdagger} \).

c) By adding servile letters (in the beginning, middle or end) \( \text{\textdagger} \) east - place of sunrise;
\( \text{\textdagger} \) teacher \( \text{\textdagger} \) affliction \( \text{\textdagger} \) mineral/metal, \( \text{\textdagger} \) faith etc.

Though not entirely dependent upon their forms, nouns can be grouped maintaining the relation of a particular form to a particular signification as 1) noun active or first class, 2) noun passive or second class, 3) noun of action or third class.

1) Noun active comprises all nouns usually expressing the agent or doer of action denoted by the verb. (There are 3 forms from the primitive and 2 each from the derivatives. eg. \( \text{\textdagger} \) friend \( \text{\textdagger} \) thief \( \text{\textdagger} \) redeemer; \( \text{\textdagger} \) sanctifying, \( \text{\textdagger} \) sanctifier, \( \text{\textdagger} \) betraying; \( \text{\textdagger} \) one who writes/causes to write.

2) Noun passive consists of nouns derived from the passive participle of the active voice and from the active participle of the passive voice usually having a passive signification. It indicates the subject of the passion or quality expressed by the verb i.e. the subject or person on whom the action expressed by the verb is fulfilled. The form in \( \text{\textdagger} \) (from passive verbs) have the sense of "capable of, worthy of" as, \( \text{\textdagger} \) worthy of praise, \( \text{\textdagger} \) tangible. The primitive verbs of the first 3 classes have two noun forms each and the 4th
class has three. The derivatives have one each. The passives may have two each, (the second by suffixing َلَ) v.g.

3) The noun of action comprises all other nouns commonly expressing the action, manner of doing, quality, instrument, or state etc. indicated by the verb. v.g. ُهَدَى (ُهَدَى) door, trap ُهَدَى (ُهَدَى) finding discovery, etc. ُهَدَى (ُهَدَى)

Note: They are formed by a) change of vowels; b) addition of suffixes and prefixes.

ADJECTIVES.

The gender, number, states etc. of adjectives are exactly the same as those of nouns. The nouns active and passive are used as adjectives (because of their very nature). There are many adjectives derived in the form of nouns of action as ُجَبَطَ modest ُجَبَطَ great, ُجَبَطَ red.

Appendix: The main differences in the conjugation of certain verbs.

Appendix II The following excerpt of dialogues is taken from the booklet of Malpan Andrews Kalappurackal (1922 which I had copied in 1944 from the printed text of Rev. Fr. Zacharias Thekkekandam- Kalappurackal C.M.I.) The author had prepared it for the study and use of students of Syriac. May this help to fulfill his earnest desire.
Asking and thanking.

I have a favour to beg of you.

Do me this favour.

Will you do me another favour?

I am very much obliged to you.

I am extremely indebted to you.

I thank you.

I give you much trouble.

You take a great deal of trouble for me.

I am very sorry to trouble you so much.

I am ashamed of the trouble I give you.

No trouble at all.

Please don't mention it.

Affirming and denying.

I will tell you what to do.

This is what I can assure you.

I wage it is so.

I wage it is not so.

I fancy so.

I fancy not.

Why do you think so?

I do not think so.

I dare say it is so.

What do you mean?

I don't know what you mean.

It is a fact.

Are you assured of what you say?

I should not have thought it so.

I wonder at it.

This is quite astonishing.

It is a thing not to be conceived.

It is incredible.

That is very strange.

This is something strange.
I congratulate you on it.

Will you allow me to congratulate you?

Sorrow. (Greek)

I am sorry for it.

I am quite vexed at it.

I feel extremely mortified at it.

I am quite inconsiderate at it.

It vexes me beyond expression.

What a pity!

It is a sad thing.

It is very provoking.

It is a cruel case.

It is shocking.

It is a great misfortune.

It is terrible.

It makes one's hair stand on end.

Blame.

Are you not ashamed?
You ought to be ashamed.

I am ashamed of you.

What a shame!

It is a shame.

It is shameful.

How naughty it is!

It is abominable.

How can you be so naughty?

You are very much to blame.

You are very (quite) wrong.

I have no patience with you.

I am not satisfied with you.

Be quiet.

Can't you be still?

Can't you be quiet?

Mind what I say.

Mind for another time.

Don't do so any more.

Don't be impatient.

Silence. Hold your tongue.

Will you hold your tongue?

Will you hold your tongue?

Get out of my sight.

I am very angry.

I am not in good humour.

I am out of my humour now.

I am quite provoked.

I am quite exasperated.

He is totally unhinged.

He is in a terrible passion.

It makes me quite mad.
What is to be done?

What course is to be taken?

What course are we to take?

What have we to do?

What remains for us to do now?

We must resolve upon something.

We must take some course.

I am quite puzzled.

I don't know what to do.

I am at a loss what to do.

I am in great embarrassment.

This is very embarrassing.

I am thinking of one thing.

An idea has just struck me.

Come, let us do one thing.

I have altered my opinion.

Let us do otherwise.

What do you say to that?

What do you think of it?

I think as you do.

It is very well imagined.

That is a very good idea.

I am of your opinion.

Let us do so.

It is the best way.

Would it not be better?

It is the best thing we can do.

It is the only thing we have to do.

That is the only course we can take.

Is there any news today?

What is the best news?

What news can you tell us?

Have you not heard of anything?
I have not heard of anything.

This is very good news.

Did you read the newspaper?

What does the paper say?

I have read no paper today.

Did you see that in any paper?

It is only mentioned in a private letter.

Do they say who received that private letter?

Yes, they name the person.

They doubt this news very much.

This news wants confirmation.

Whence have you had this news?

I have had that news from good authority.

That report is proved false.

Do they still talk of war?

Have you received any letter from your brother?

How long is it since he wrote to you?

I have not heard from him these two months.

I expect a letter or card from him every day.

Going and coming.
When can I see him?

Do you know when he will return?

No, he said nothing when he went out.

In that case, we should go without him.

Sir, sir, he does not hear me.

Who calls me? Oh is it you? I did not see you.

Did you not hear me?

I did; but I did not think that I was called.

I was going to visit your son.

You would not have seen him.

Why not?

Because he is not at home; he is never at home during the day.

Then I will wait for him.

Spiritual bouquet.

Masses offered.

Masses heard.

Holy communion.

Spiritual communion.

Way of the cross.

Rosary.

Visit to the B.Sacrament.

Mortifications.

Ejaculations.
THE GIST OF SYRIAC GRAMMAR.

When they come to languages
Families five make sages.
One of them is Aryan
One is named Mongolian.

One is called Dravidian
One Semitic, one Negroid.
Aramaic, Arabic
And Hebrew are Semitic.

We can safely too divide
Our study of ‘Ramaic
Which we now call Syriac
Into two groups for our ease.

One is that of the Grammar
Next is of Literature.
Grammar can be divided
Into four parts for study.

Orthography comes as first
Second Etymology
Third is Syntax and the fourth
Is the part called Prosody.

Literature has two parts
First, language’s history
Next is called the study of
Literary works therein.

Orthography’s part can be
Classified into three groups
Consonants and vowels and
Specialities of reading.

Doubling, Assimilation,
Occultation, M’tathesis
Substitution, Soft and Hard,
Are the six of consonants.

S’va, M’haggyana, and Speedy
Reading called Marhathana
And the like are of Vowels
And Diacritics are there.

Consonants we can divide
Under six headings for ease
And then move to Vowels fast;
Next we start to read pronouns.

Root we call the verbal stem
Which is in the singular
Masculine third person form;
From it we form all others.

We decline the Personals
From which learn Insep’rables.
And from them we can now form
Second and Third group suffix.

From these three groups we can get
Groups of Object Suffixes.
Verb ‘To Be’ in Present Tense
Can personals too express.

Verbs are of three Radicals;
And the Past Tense can be learned
With the help of Endings of
Pronouns attached to the root.

From the roots we are to turn
Unto Imperative forms;
From which Future can be formed
With Prefix and Suffixes.

From the root we then form out
Infinitive forms as well;
With the change of some vowels
We come to Participles.
Future with some particles
Show Subjunctive or purpose;
Prohibition is shown by
‘LA’ with future tense only.

Present participles with
Personal pronouns do form
Present tense in agreement
Of person, gend’r, and number.

‘ES’ prefix is what we give
For the Passive of the verbs;
Which will be substituted
By the prefix of the form.

But when there are too many ‘THAV’s
One or two can be dropped off
If the verbal form can be
Distinguished from such others.

As we conjugate the roots
So do we for all the verbs;
Frequentatives and Passives
All will follow the same way.

When one or more radicals
Are weak letters verbs will show
Some sorts of specialities
Which we can discern with ease.

When we come to nouns some are
Termed Primitives and others
Are then called Derivatives.
And are mostly from the verbs.

From the root three nouns we form
Two each from frequentatives;
From the passives two may come;
One each their frequentals may give.

Participles well mastered
Will help us to master nouns.
Gender’s mostly determined
By the way they terminate.

For the States of nouns we have
Rules governing formation
Adjectives are like the nouns
For Gender, States and the like.

Participle Fem. does come
As the noun in Masculine
And its G'dama is often
Particip’al masculine.

A good lot of masculines
End in ‘A’ if Singular;
‘A’ will change to ‘E’ to form
Plurals of these kinds of nouns.

Of course, some have some other
Forms that are not regular.
Some take just additionals;
Rules may not be water-tight.

Noun Fem. forms its plural word
Into ‘ASA’ if in ‘THA’.
Some have not any reg’lar form
Some may use a diff’rent word.

Nouns in ‘A’ have only one
G’dama and that dropping ‘A’.
Those in ‘THA’ have usually
Two distinct forms of G’dama.

Nouns in ‘E’ have ‘AI’ Construct
And in ‘EEN’ their Absolute.
Nouns in ‘ASA’ have construct
‘AS’; and ‘AN’ as Absolute.

Adjectives come after nouns
Unless for stress set before.
But verbs usually precede.
Subject in a good sentence.

Poetic Metres vary
According to Syllables.
Plenty of poems we see
In syllables Five or S’ven.
Those in Four and Six we see
Less frequent than those before.
Those of Twelve are in plenty
As if four of three joined.

Threes of Five steps do exist
As well as those of Six steps.
Octo Syllab’s are also
In use, in this good language.

Rhyming of the steps we see
In beginning or ending.
And Acrostics too we see
Used by poets of repute.

Fr. Emmanuel Thelly C.M.I.

*********************

Note:
‘Ramaic = Aramaic.
Syllab’s = syllables.
Past participle = past participle.
Inseparable = inseparable.
Gender’s = gender is.
Frequentative’s = frequentatives.