

COURSE SYLLABUS

RELS 6000

Readings in Syriac

F 11:00-1:45

Dr. John C. Reeves

Macy 204B

Office hours: WR 2:30-3:30; or by appointment

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[Home Page of John C. Reeves](#)

Course description: This course provides an introduction to the Syriac language for those graduate students who are already reasonably conversant with the linguistic structures of biblical Hebrew and/or Aramaic.¹ We will study the basic principles of Syriac grammar, vocabulary, and syntax while simultaneously reading and translating brief selections drawn from early and medieval Christian compositions and Islamicate translations of Greek, Pahlavi, and Sanskrit texts. We will simultaneously peruse a number of secondary essays and articles which will expose the student to the diverse corpora of literature expressed in Syriac.

Required textbooks:

J. F. Coakley, *Robinson's Paradigms and Exercises in Syriac Grammar* (5th ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Some secondary essays and articles (to be distributed or assigned by the instructor)

Most Syriac texts will be reproduced and distributed as needed by the instructor from the following works:

Louis Costaz and Paul Mouterde, eds., *Anthologie syriaque* (Beirut: Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1955).

Eberhard Nestle, *Syriac Grammar with Bibliography, Chrestomathy and Glossary* (2d ed.; trans. Archd. R. S. Kennedy; Berlin: H. Reuther, 1889).

Aemilius Roediger, *Chrestomathia Syriaca: quam glossario et tabulis grammaticis* (3d ed.; ed. Johannes Roediger; Halis Saxonum: Sumtibus Orphanotrophei, 1892).

Recommended purchases (not available at UNC Charlotte bookstore):

J. Payne Smith, ed., *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903). Reprinted several times during the twentieth century; the only convenient and relatively inexpensive Syriac-English lexicon presently available. And it is available online [here](#).

Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (2d ed.; Halle, 1928; repr., Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966). A very useful Syriac-Latin lexicon. **Note:** this has now been translated, corrected, expanded, and updated by Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Winona Lake/Piscataway: Eisenbrauns/Gorgias Press, 2009).

Theodor Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar* (trans. James A. Crichton; 2d ed.; London, 1904; repr., Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2001). Still the standard reference grammar for Syriac, originally published as *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik* (1880, 1898²). The Eisenbrauns reprint of Crichton's rendering also includes an English version of Nöldeke's marginal corrections and notes gleaned from his interleaved copy of the 1898 2d edition.

¹ This specific course suggests as its minimum prerequisite: (1) the successful completion at UNC Charlotte of LACS 1201 and 1202; i.e., 'Introduction to Biblical Hebrew I' and 'II'; or (2) an equivalent sequence of introductory biblical Hebrew or Aramaic courses at another institution of higher learning; i.e., amounting to two semesters, three quarters, or one year; or (3) the verbal permission of the instructor.

Ktabē qadiše (London: United Bible Societies, 1979). Relatively inexpensive edition of the Peshitta version of the Bible.

Course requirements:

a. *Diligent attendance.* Almost perfect attendance is an essential requirement for this course. Each class session builds upon the knowledge gained and skills acquired during previous meetings. Moreover, oral recitation and discussion of assigned readings comprises a significant portion of almost every class session; if you are not present to recite or otherwise participate, a value of 0 for this portion of your grade is the inevitable result. The instructor's assessment of one's attendance, class preparation, homework exercises,² performance on quizzes (should such be required), and oral recitation will constitute 100% of the final course grade.

b. *Critical discussions.* Almost every week during a portion of the class period students will orally expound and collectively discuss the content of at least one secondary article or essay that has been previously assigned by the instructor. Individual students may be asked to present and guide our discussions. The readings will initially come from the bibliography of articles listed below. The instructor's evaluation of the student's contributions to these assignments will be factored into the class preparation component of the final course grade.

c. Each student is responsible for all lectures, class discussions, assignments, and announcements, whether or not he/she is present when they occur.

Miscellaneous information:

a. The grading scale used in this course is as follows:

91-100	A
81-90	B
71-80	C
0-70	U

b. One of the requirements of this course is to complete the work of the course on time. Sometimes there are legitimate reasons for late work—an illness or other emergency. 'Emergency,' however, does not include your social involvements, travel plans, job schedule, disk and/or printer failures, the state of your love life, your obligations to other courses, or general malaise over the state of the world. The world has been in a mess as long as anyone can remember, and most of the world's work is done by people whose lives are a mass of futility and discontent. If you haven't learned yet, you had better learn now to work under the conditions of the world as it is. Therefore:

1) All quizzes and examinations take place only upon their announced dates and times. In other words (and please note well!), there will be NO MAKEUP EXAMS scheduled. This of course includes unannounced 'pop-quizzes.' All missed exams, quizzes, and homework assignments are tallied as a 0 in the computation of the course grade. No exceptions will be considered or granted.

2) Written homework exercises for which a roman font is used must be typed and double-spaced; apart from Syriac print or script, no handwritten exercises will be accepted. Written homework exercises are assessed according to the following formulae: $\sqrt{+}$ = A- (roughly 5 or fewer errors); $\sqrt{}$ = C+ (roughly 6-20 errors); $\sqrt{-}$ = U (more than 20 errors and/or incomplete work).

3) For accounting purposes, letter grades bear the following values: A=95; A-=92; B=85; C+=78; C=75; U=35.

4) Since your diligent physical participation is critical for the success of this course, attendance at class meetings will be monitored by the instructor. One absence is regrettable; two absences are the limit of tolerability. Three (3) or more absences will result in an automatic U for the course. Please

² Almost every class meeting will conclude with the assignment of readings and homework drawn usually from Coakley. Unless stated otherwise, such assignments fall due at the next class meeting.

note that the instructor does not distinguish ‘excused’ from ‘unexcused’ absences. Unsanctioned late arrivals and early departures will be tallied as absences.

c. Assistance and solicitation of criticism is your right as a member of the class. It is not a privilege to be granted or withheld. Do not hesitate to request it nor wait too late in the course for it to be of help.

d. A number of Semitic language lexical and grammatical aids are available for student consultation in the [Cuneiform Studies Laboratory](#) (Macy 216). For assistance, please see the instructor.

CONTENTS OF THE SYRIAC CULTURAL READER (TENTATIVE)

I. Cultural Introduction

L. W. Barnard, “The Origins and Emergence of the Church in Edessa During the First Two Centuries A.D.,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968): 161-75.

Sebastian P. Brock, “Syriac Culture, 337-425,” in Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XIII: The Late Empire, A.D. 337-425* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 708-19.

John F. Healey, “The Edessan Milieu and the Birth of Syriac,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 10.2 (Summer 2007).

Robert Murray, “The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity,” in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (ed. Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews, and Robert W. Thomson; Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 3-16.

Lucas Van Rompay, “The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, Volume I: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300), Part 1: Antiquity* (ed. Magne Sæbø; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 612-41.

_____, “Development of Biblical Interpretation in the Syrian Churches of the Middle Ages,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, Volume I: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300), Part 2: The Middle Ages* (ed. Magne Sæbø; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 559-77.

Michael P. Weitzman, “From Judaism to Christianity: The Syriac Version of the Hebrew Bible,” in Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak, eds., *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1992), 147-73.

II. Some Selected Themes

S[ebastian]. P. Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” *Numen* 20 (1973): 1-19.

_____, “Eusebius and Syriac Christianity,” in Harold A. Attridge and Gohei Hata, eds., *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 212-34.

_____, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 212-32.

David Bundy, “Pseudepigrapha in Syriac Literature,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers* (ed. Kent H. Richards; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 745-65.

Han J. W. Drijvers, “Jews and Christians at Edessa,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 36 (1985): 88-102.

Sidney H. Griffith, “Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Hâlê and a Muslim Emir,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3.1 (January 2000).

Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Beyond the Land of Nod: Syriac Images of Asia and the Historiography of ‘the West,’” *History of Religions* 49 (2009): 48-87.

III. Some Recent Topical Studies

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “The *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Mishnah for the Disciples of Jesus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001): 483-509.

Sidney H. Griffith, "The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm of Christian Thought in Edessa in the Fifth Century," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 6.2 (July 2003).

Serge Ruzer, "The *Cave of Treasures* on Swearing by Abel's Blood and Expulsion from Paradise: Two Exegetical Motifs in Context," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001): 251-71.

SOME INTERNET RESOURCES FOR SYRIAC LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

[Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon](#) – a database which features an extensive collection of Syriac texts.

Be sure to reference the remarks under 'Getting and using the CAL fonts' >> 'Syriac Unicode' for proper screen display on your machine.

[Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies](#) – an important online journal published semi-annually

[Patrologia Syriaca](#) and [Patrologia Orientalis](#) – happily, a surprising number of these volumes are now available online.

[Syriac Books](#) – a digital repository for some very important editions and manuscript catalogues

[Syriac Studies Reference Library](#) – more electronic resources