Book Reviews

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Neo-Aramaic and its linguistic context, Gorgias Press.

This volume consists of a collection of papers arising out of two Neo-Aramaic conferences, one in Cambridge in 2011 and the other in Jerusalem in 2013. It covers several modern branches of Aramaic, namely Ṣurayt, a cluster of dialects native to the Ṭur ʿAbdin region of Turkey, Neo-Mandaic (spoken by Mandaens in Iran) and the largest branch, North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (nena), spoken in Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria. Only Western Neo-Aramaic (native to three villages in Syria) is absent. These branches of Aramaic diverged from each other already in ancient times, so today we are dealing with a language family rather than a single Aramaic language. Furthermore the branches are themselves divided into diverse dialects. Nena, in particular, has a huge number of dialects, many of which are mutually incomprehensible. Nena has also attracted the most attention in recent years, and this is reflected in this volume.

Unusually for works on Semitic languages, examples are fully glossed throughout, mostly according to the Leipzig Glossing Rules (abbreviations are listed at the beginning). This makes it accessible to a wider linguistic readership, as well as to Semitists not familiar with the particular varieties covered. This point alone makes the book a significant contribution in this field. A general index as well as an index of languages, personal and geographical names enhances the book's usefulness as a reference work.

The book is organised as follows: firstly papers on Ṣurayt, then on nena, followed by Neo-Mandaic. Finally an areal perspective is given, with three papers on parallels between Aramaic and its neighbours.

Studies in the Ṣurayt Verb, by Yulia Furman and Sergey Loesov, is divided into two sections. The first outlines the verb glossary project the authors are involved in. This is a valuable initiative for Ṣurayt, which is lacking in lexical resources. The need for a thorough lexical documentation increases as the lan-
language, now spoken mostly in the diaspora, becomes ever more endangered. Such a documentation of Ṭuroyo verbs is also vital for a greater understanding of Ṭuroyo morphosyntax. As the authors state, Ṭuroyo is also key to understanding the crucial period in the history of Eastern Aramaic. Ṭuroyo is more conservative than its close relation Nena in having preserved both some degree of ergativity and the special intransitive stem (derived from the Aramaic intransitive verbal adjective CaCCiC). As so often, the divide is not simply between transitive and intransitive predicates but rather more complex. Part II explores this with regard to the argument structure of two-place experiencer verbs which conjugate as intransitives. The authors conclude that the intransitive stem has been extended beyond its original distribution to some two-place experiencer verbs, of both inherited and borrowed roots.

Towards a Description of Written Ṣurayt/Ṭuroyo: Some Syntactic Functions of the Particle Kal, by Maciej Tomal, deals with the morphosyntactic behaviour of copulas in literary Ṣurayt/Ṭuroyo texts. The initial presentation of the different copulas (p. 31) is somewhat confusing. The author states that there are three sets of ‘particles’ which fill the copula slot: the enclitic copula, independent copula and emphatic independent copula, i.e. one enclitic and two independent copulas. However, the paradigms of the independent copulas which are presented (unglossed) alone number three: formed on the stems kët-, kal- and këll-. In fact, it seems the last two are dialectal variants of the emphatic copula (cf. Ritter 1990: 38–42). Tomal considers whether the functional contrast of contingent and permanent features or states plays a role in Ṭuroyo, as it does in Nena copulas. He finds that kët- is very common with locative predicates. From the examples, in fact, it appears that many examples with kët- in main clauses, including with locative predicates, retain an existential function (kët- is formed from the existential particle kit(o) ‘there is’). The kët- copula is also commonly found in relative clauses. Ritter (1990: 23) notes that kët- is used in place of the enclitic copula when there is nothing to which the enclitic could attach, and this explains its usage after the relative particle d-, which cannot be attached to an unstressed clitic. Tomal finds that the kal- copula never occurs in relative clauses, but appears in independent clauses ‘usually constituting elements of a preliminary narrative setting and introducing new referents’. In this role, he finds, it contrasts with the more neutral existential particle kito, in that it expresses an element of surprise, a function which is shared by deictic copulas in Nena.

Preliminary Remarks on Discourse Pragmatics in Turoyo, by Michael Waltisberg, focuses on two issues in the discourse pragmatics of Ṭuroyo. The first is the use of the independent subject pronoun (for instance to take the focus, or to indicate a change of subject) and the second covers various strategies used in