

# Syriac

## The alphabet

Transcribe alphabetical letters as follows. This table shows the estrangela forms of the letters. Most of the pointed examples below use the serto (West Syriac) and East Syriac forms, which may be found in most Syriac textbooks.

ܐ	' or disregarded*	ܐ	l
ܒ	b	ܡ	m
ܓ	g	ܢ	n
ܕ	d	ܫ	s
ܗ	h	ܥ	'
ܘ	w**	ܦ	p
ܙ	z	ܨ	š
ܠ	l	ܩ	q
ܘ	y**	ܪ	r
ܟ	k	ܫ	š
		ܬ	t

\**Alaph* is disregarded only when it carries the vowel *ā* or *e* at the end of a word.

Examples:

ܡܝܡܪܐ mi'mrā    ܝܙܓܕܐ 'izgade  
 ܫܘܪܝܐ Sūriya'    ܝܫܪܐܝܝܠ 'Isrā'yel

\*\* When consonantal. Otherwise see *vowels*, *diphthongs*, and *silent letters* below. Note that for the letters *bgdkpt*, no distinction is made between the hard and soft pronunciation (*quššāyā*, *rukkākā*). Also note that doubling of consonants is not reproduced.

Examples:

ܩܩܐܠ qatēl    ܙܕܝܩܐ zadīqā.

## Vowels

Transcribe vowels as follows. This table shows West and East Syriac vowels placed on alphabetical letters in the relevant scripts. The vowels are less often seen with the estrangela script, but they would be transliterated in the same way.

ܐ	ܐ	a
ܐ	ܐ	ā
ܐ	ܐ	e
ܐ	ܐ	é that is, when the vowel <i>e</i> is carried by <i>yod</i>



2. Some other words in West Syriac which have a long *i* (=) vowel in Payne Smith, especially words in which this vowel is carried by *alaph*, have *e* in East Syriac.

Examples:

ܩܘܢܐ ki'nā / ܩܘܢܐ ke'nā      ܢܝܬܐ ni'te / ܢܝܬܐ ne'te.

3. Words with an original vowel on *alaph* are shown in Payne Smith with the vowel moved onto a preceding vowelless consonant. In East Syriac, these words keep the vowel on *alaph*.

Examples:

ܬܒܐ ܬܒܐ te'b / ܬܒܐ ܬܒܐ ṭ'eb      ܫܘܠܬܐ ܫܘܠܬܐ še'ltā / ܫܘܠܬܐ ṣ'eltā

For East Syriac vocalization, if in doubt, consult M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac lexicon* (2009). Examples of a few other words that are different in East Syriac are:

ܫܘܓܝܐ sagiyā' / ܫܘܓܝܐ sagi'ā      ܐܡܝܢ amín / ܐܡܝܢ āmén

### Loan words

Supplying vowels on unvocalized foreign words in Syriac can be difficult. Ancient and medieval proper names may be found in R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (2 vols., 1868-1901). *Alaph* is not disregarded at the end of a word when it carries a vowel other than *ā* or *e*. Watch for the letter *yod* which may be both a vowel and a consonant.

Examples:

ܕܝܘܬܝܩܝ ܕܝܘܬܝܩܝ diyatíqi      ܕܝܘܬܝܩܝ ܕܝܘܬܝܩܝ diyatíqi'      ܕܝܘܬܝܩܝ ܕܝܘܬܝܩܝ dyatéqe.

In Greek names ending in *-os*, transliterate the West Syriac vowel *o* as *o*. Example: ܩܘܠܘܘܫ Pawlos (*not* Pawlāws or Pawlwās).

### Silent letters

*Silent letters* are treated as if not silent. *Waw* and *yod* will normally be transliterated as *u* and *i* respectively; but when they make a diphthong, transliterate them as *w* and *y*.

Examples:

ܡܠܟܐ malki      ܓܒܝܗܝ gbāyhi      ܐܝܬܘܗܝ 'itawhi      ܩܬܠܐ qṭalú  
ܩܬܠܐ qṭalti      ܡܠܟܘܗܝ malkawhi      ܐܒܘܗܝ 'abúhi      ܩܬܠܐ qatłani  
ܢܝܓܠܘܗܝ neglewhi      ܡܪܝ Māri      ܐܝܟ ayk      ܐܝܕܐ 'idtā      ܢܐܝܝܢ nāš.

## Hyphens

*Hyphens* are used to separate prefixes and compounds that are written together.

Examples:

ܩܬܒܐ ܕܐܩܕܐܡ ܘܕܒܐܬܐܪ    ܕܝܕܐ    ktābā da-qdām wad-bātar    ܕܝܕܐ    d-ida<sup>c</sup>  
 ܘܘܥܡܪ    w-<sup>3</sup>emar (in this case, *not* we<sup>3</sup>-mar)  
 ܗܒ ܠܢ    hab-lan    ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܒܫܒܐ    trén-b-šabā

However, compounds that are printed in Payne Smith's dictionary as single words are not hyphenated. Thus:

ܡܘܩܘܠܗܢܐ    meṭulhānā.

## Capitalization

Words are capitalized as they would be in English. If a word starts with ʾ or ʿ the next letter is capitalized.

## Modern Syriac

For 'modern Syriac' (any of several neo-Aramaic dialects) use the same rules for transliteration of consonants and vowels as for classical Syriac. Transliterate the extra East Syriac letters as follows:

ܥ	ǧ
ܥ̣	č
ܥ̇	ž
ܥ̈	š (same as ܥ̈ without tilde).

If you are supplying vowels, follow the vocalized forms (but not the romanization) in A. J. Maclean, *A dictionary of the dialects of vernacular Syriac* (1901), or failing that, another dictionary such as *Oraham's dictionary of the ... Assyrian language* (1943), or the glossary in R. Macuch, *Neusyrische Chrestomathie* (1974).