

A Word from the Suryoyo Translators

Like any living people on earth, the speakers of Modern Syriac (Suryoyo or Turoyo) deserve the Good News of Jesus in their mother tongue. Their forefathers were, in fact, the first to translate the Bible from Greek into their own language, the wide-spread spoken Aramaic dialect of Edessa. That translation was called Simple (Peshitto) because it meant to be simple and accessible to all; the translators preferred everyday language to the royal Edessene Aramaic. But today, after centuries of change in grammar and vocabulary, the Good News, which was meant to be Simple, is no longer simple. In fact, it is difficult and inaccessible to the vast majority of Suryoyo speakers. Therefore it has become urgent to have the Good News in a Simple form once again. This is necessary to fulfill the ultimate mission of the Syriac people, if, as our Lord Jesus Christ said, the people of Nineveh are to rise and condemn the unrepentant generation (Mt 12:41).

Writing in modern Suryoyo is relatively new, and there are no universally accepted standards. We have sought, with patience and faith, to strike a balance between maintaining Classical Syriac spelling and representing the sounds of the spoken Suryoyo of today. Wherever possible, our guide has been the principles that underlie spelling and word division in Classical Syriac and other Semitic languages. There is no room here to state those principles in full. We will simply point to a few of the most noticeable important features.

The most frequent feature is the definite article. In the spoken language, it is heard as [u] with masculine nouns, [i] with feminine, and [a(n)] with plurals. We write:

ܐܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ

These are written with **he** (ܐ) because of their relationship with pronoun forms in the modern and classical language. It is important to note that the final **nun** (ܢ) of the plural assimilates to the beginning consonant of the noun unless the noun begins with **olaf** (ܐ) or **nun** (ܢ). When this occurs we write the article and noun together:

ܐܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ

We should also note the presence of contracted forms, which reflect pronunciation and follow patterns of contraction seen in Classical Syriac examples such as:

ܐܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ < ܐܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ

In the modern language, we use contractions such as:

ܐܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ < ܐܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ ܕܚܘܢܐ

The spelling used in our publications for the Roman and Arabic scripts aims at simplicity and legibility. At present, there is no firm standard usage for these, just as there is no consensus on the spelling of the modern language in Syriac script. Writers in different parts of the world, and even individual writers, use different systems. We wish to emphasize that all three orthographies used are submitted for approval and correction. We look forward to the day when the Suryoyo community which now is spread over the world will set agreed standards for the writing of this living Syriac tongue.

We will be very thankful for your comments, whether on the text or on its spelling, and especially for your prayers for the work ahead.