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Book Review of A dictionary of Syrian Arabic : English-Arabic edited by Karl Stowasser and Ani Moukhtar

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Citation Details

Kern, Kristen. Book review of "A Dictionary of Syrian Arabic: English-Arabic: English-Arabic." By Karl Stowasser and Moukhtar Ani, editors; foreword by Elizabeth M. Bergman. Georgetown Classics in Arabic Language and Linguistics, Karin C. Ryding and Margaret Nydell series editors. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004. Published in MELA Notes, Number 80 (2007): 65-67.

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in which a traveler might find him or herself. An attempt is made to expose the reader to Iraqi folklore and culture through the selected scenarios, additional notes included in the lessons, and the illustrations that accompany the chapters. All in all, this is a work that encompasses all that is needed for a beginning student of Arabic to learn the basics of the Iraqi dialect, or for a student already practiced in Arabic to convert to Iraqi dialect.

JONATHAN HOPWOOD

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A Dictionary of Syrian Arabic: English-Arabic: English-Arabic. By Karl Stowasser and Moukhtar Ani, editors; foreword by Elizabeth M. Bergman. Georgetown Classics in Arabic Language and Linguistics, Karin C. Ryding and Margaret Nydell series editors. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004. Pp. xxv, 269. ISBN 1-58901-105-8.)Paperback) \$39.50.

Originally published in 1964 as part of a series produced by the federally funded Arabic Research Program at Georgetown University, *A Dictionary of Syrian Arabic* has been reissued as one of the titles in the Georgetown Classics in Arabic Language and Linguistics series. The Arabic Research Program series admirably strived to provide “practical tools for the increasing number of Americans whose lives bring them into contact with the Arab world” (vii). Recent events have only accelerated the need for useful references and texts for this purpose, though it is perhaps surprising that a work published over forty years ago continues to hold a significant place among Arabic dialectal dictionaries.

The dictionary is based on the spoken language of educated Damascenes that has more in common with the dialects of urban Beirut and Jerusalem, than with those of rural Syria or employed by Syrian Bedouins. The dialect in Arabic, the editors note, is the accepted means of oral communication, an instance of diglossia wherein the written language must be acquired through education, although it is perceived as the model of Arabic language.

In their exemplary introduction, the editors begin by revealing the importance that the “profound social upheaval” of the early to mid 20th century has had on language through modernization and the expansion of universal education, and likewise the spread and influence of the media. They found a ‘remarkable and far reaching socio-linguistic

phenomenon: the blurring of the line between dialect and written language and the emergence of a spoken idiom containing so many features of written Arabic that it can almost be called a third language” (xiii). Following this statement are examples of these variants that illustrate this conclusion.

The introduction next discusses the organization of the dictionary’s entries by parts of speech categories: nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Sound and broken plurals of nouns are noted; for adjectives only the broken plurals are provided. The verbs, as is usual, are presented in perfect tense third person singular masculine. First form trilateral verbs are succeeded by the imperfect tense stem vowel, verbal noun(s) and the passive. Verb forms II–X only have the passive represented.

Transcription practices used in the dictionary are succinctly described in corresponding columns: the transcription letter symbol; the symbol’s pronunciation details, often with English equivalents; and, the Arabic script letter. Conventions of this particular system are the use of ‘?’ (? minus the period) for the ‘*hamzah*’/glottal stop; ‘q̣’ for the ‘*qāf*’; and what appears to be a handwritten ‘*ayn*’ for its Arabic equivalent. The editors also note significant characteristics of the colloquial language, such as the elimination of the classical interdental spirants (*thā*, *dhāl* and *zā*), the “helping vowel” akin to the ‘*o*’ and the current use of the classical ‘*qāf*’ in some words.

The preface concludes with clear descriptions of the essential characteristics of spoken Syrian Arabic: velarization, the important distinction between long and short sounds, accentuation and assimilation. A clear understanding of these features and careful attention to the pronunciation instructions given sufficiently prepares an American speaker to successfully tackle the dialect.

The entries and subentries, numbering approximately 15,000, and defined by both synonyms and useful contextual examples, are as neatly produced as they were forty years ago, no revision having been made to the text or content. While the reprinting of this dictionary is significant as no later works have truly supplanted it, nor has it been out of print, it is unfortunate that the current publishers did not take the opportunity to update the content to account for inexorable global changes in communication, technology, the environment and the political realities of Arabic speaking world, to name a few of the most obvious areas that are reflected in everyday vocabulary. It would also be a worthy aspiration for the Georgetown program to realize the goal of the original

series editor, Richard S. Harrell whose untimely death prevented the completion of the work, to produce the complementary Arabic-English dictionary of Syrian Arabic.

For travelers seeking out a handy dictionary to use on their journey to Syria, this volume is not a pocket sized reference; but for students and users of the spoken language, this rigorously accurate work will be useful for accessing standard, if not recently coined, vocabulary. As with other titles in this reprint series, if your library already owns a serviceable copy of this work, it is not necessary to acquire this one.

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The Top 1,000 Words for Understanding Media Arabic. By Elisabeth Kendall. Washington, D.C. : Georgetown University Press, 2005. Pp. 90. ISBN-10: 158901068X. ISBN-13: 978-1589010680. \$11.95 (paperback).

This short book attempts to present the most common and/or important vocabulary needed to understand "Media Arabic," the language of printed and broadcast news. The vocabulary is organized into eight lists, each treating one of the following categories: general, politics, elections, military, economics, trade and industry, law and order, and disaster and aid. One must not expect too much from this book however. It contains no grammatical notes, or texts containing the vocabulary items, nor does the book provide sentences using the terms and phrases in context. Each Arabic item is printed on the left side with the English translation (or equivalent term) on the right. The introduction suggests that "this book is best used in conjunction with Julia Ashtiany's excellent *Media Arabic*," but the vocabulary lists do not correspond to the texts or exercises in that book. One must do a lot of individual work to use the two books together effectively, and because the terms and phrases are not alphabetized in Arabic or English, and there is no index, one cannot use this book as a glossary for easy reference. The author considers alphabetical order an impediment to memorization, so one is expected to use the book as a learning tool rather than as a reference source.