

Surayt Orthography

ERASMUS + ARAMAIC-ONLINE PROJECT (2014–2017)



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Abstract

The Surayt Orthography document has been developed through a long process of discussions, which took place since 2012 and involved a broad group of language experts, linguists and community stakeholders. The orthography document has been reviewed in several gatherings: (i) University of Bergen (June 2012); (ii) Freie Universität Berlin (October 2013), (iii) Mor Ephrem Monastery, Netherlands (2014); (iv) University of Cambridge (August 2015); (v) Training workshop at Mor Yacop Sarug Monastery, Germany (August 2016), and (vi) Training event at Södertälje Municipality (October 2016). This document aims to establish the basic rules and foundations on the Surayt (Turoyo) Orthography using the Syriac and Roman letters respectively. Our approach is highly inclusive and open for any suggestions for improvements.

Aramaic-Online Project

(2014-2017)

The principal aim of the Aramaic-Online Project (AOP) has been to develop an online course and new language learning materials in Surayt-Aramaic (also known as Turoyo), which is today spoken by approximately 250,000 people in Europe.

Surayt is a Neo-Aramaic language belonging to the Aramaic branch of the Semitic language family. It is spoken by the Syriac Christians (also known as Arameans and Assyrians) in different countries in the Middle East. Surayt is a continuation of the old Aramaic language – famous as the language of Jesus - with a distinguished cultural and linguistic history over a period of more than 3,000 years, from 1,000 BC to the present.

The UNESCO *Atlas of The World's Languages in Danger* (2010) has classified Turoyo as 'severely endangered', because of the emigration or expulsion of its speakers from their native areas in the last 50 years. More than 80% of the speakers of this Aramaic language live outside their perceived homeland.

Surayt is enlisted as a “severely endangered” language by UNESCO due to expulsion of its native speakers from their historical habitat. Surayt has predominantly been a vernacular language and therefore it suffers from the problem that it lacks standardization when writing it, both when using the Syriac and Latin alphabets. Due to the lack of courses and language learning materials in Surayt, both native and non-native speakers have difficulty in learning Surayt or improving their knowledge of this language.

In order to address the aforementioned problems, the Consortium, consisting of four European universities – Free University of Berlin, University of Bergen, University of Cambridge, and Leipzig University – and the St Ephrem Syriac Orthodox Monastery in the Netherlands) has realized the following objectives during the course of the project:

- Developed an online course for Surayt at A1 and A2 (16 learning units) in seven different languages (English, German, Swedish, Dutch, French, Arabic and Turkish) to address both the needs of native and non-native learners of this language; each unit includes grammar and cultural boxes

- Developed new language-learning materials – equivalent to B1 level – through an innovative sub-project “10 authors, 100 essays in Surayt”;
- Standardised the writing of Surayt by developing a new orthography;
- Developed a draft for a new curriculum for teaching Surayt at tertiary institutions;
- Trained language teachers and authors of this language in two occasions;
- Organised the first international conference on Surayt in Cambridge to address the challenges which Surayt encounters in the European diaspora context;
- Organised a summer school on Surayt for the youth to promote and disseminate the online course;

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1. Etymologic or non-etymologic writing?

A decision was taken to write non-etymologically as far as possible. The door is open when there is a need to write etymologically.

2. Vowel marking

a) There is no need to write the vowels *çəşo* (ُ) and *ħbošo* (ُ) when there is *waw* and *yud* in a word. We write each /u/ with /waw/ and each /i/ with /yud/ without exceptions. In addition, each final /o/ is expressed by /olaf/ and does not need to be marked additionally by a /zqofo/.

cito = حٲا

gubo = جٲا

b) There is no need to write the dots for plural (*syome*), the correspondent vowel markers have to be used (usually *rbošo*) example:

kalbe = كٲا

katfoṭe = كٲا

katfoṭo = كٲا

c) When marking *sh^ewa*-vowel (ë) a lower *rbošo* will be used, for example:

mënyo? = مٲا؟

d) There is no need to write an *olaf* in the middle of the word, except in loan words. For example:


gëd ëzzano lu bar d šotina, گٲا د عٲا، عٲا

e) Short and long /a/:

The vowel /a/ is always expressed by *ftoḥo*:

šmayo = شٲا.

To mark a short /a/ in an open syllable, a lower *ftoḥo* can be used:

gäläbe = 

3. Article

Singular, feminine (f.)

i	إِ
<i>i barto</i> (the daughter)	إِ بَارْتَا

Singular, masculine (m.)

u	أُ
<i>u abro</i> (the son)	أُ اَبْرَا

Plural (Pl.):

Nouns with initial two consonants (CC):

<i>ak</i>	أَكْ
<i>ak klabyoto</i>	أَكْ كَلْبِيُوتَا

Nouns with initial consonant + vowel (Cv): *a + C*

<i>ak</i>	أَكْ
<i>ak kalbe</i>	أَكْ كَلْبَا
<i>an niše</i>	أَنْ نِيْشَا

Nouns with initial vowel + consonant (vC):

<i>an</i>	أَنْ
<i>an aṭrawoṭe</i>	أَنْ اَطْرَاوُوتَا
<i>an emoṭo</i>	أَنْ اَمُوتَا
<i>an aḥe</i>	أَنْ اَحَا

4. Prepositions, with article (b-, l-)

When preceded by a preposition the article loses its initial *olaf*. Article and preposition merge.

Example:

<i>bu bayto</i>	ܘܒ ܒܝܬܐ
<i>bi qriṭo</i>	ܘܒ ܩܪܝܬܐ
<i>lab bote</i>	ܘܒ ܒܘܬܐ

Prepositions referring to a word without article are connected directly to the noun in Syriac characters. In Roman characters, the prepositions are written separately.

<i>b cayno</i>	ܘܒܝܢܐ
<i>l bayto</i>	ܘܠܒܝܬܐ

Sample sentences:

<i>cabēr cal i dawmo d bi cayno dam maye</i>	ܘܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܘܒܝܢܐ ܘܕܘܠܐ ܕܘܒܝܢܐ ܘܕܘܠܐ ܕܘܒܝܢܐ
<i>gēd mhalaxno lu bayto d kētyo bi qriṭo</i>	ܘܕܘܠܐ ܕܘܒܝܬܐ ܘܕܘܠܐ ܕܘܒܝܬܐ ܘܕܘܠܐ ܕܘܒܝܬܐ
<i>bi qriṭo kuzzēn an noše li cito</i>	ܘܕܘܠܐ ܕܘܒܝܬܐ ܘܕܘܠܐ ܕܘܒܝܬܐ ܘܕܘܠܐ ܕܘܒܝܬܐ

Other examples:

<i>taht i maša</i>	ܘܬܘܬܐ ܕܘܒܝܬܐ
<i>ono w u Jan</i>	ܘܘܢܐ ܘܘܠܐ ܘܘܠܐ
<i>d bi qriṭo</i>	ܘܕܘܠܐ ܘܘܠܐ
<i>di qriṭo</i>	ܘܕܘܠܐ ܘܘܠܐ
<i>dē qriṭo</i>	ܘܕܘܠܐ ܘܘܠܐ

5. The copula (-no, -yo, -ne, -hatu etc.)

yo, hat, hēt, no, ne, hatu, na ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا

The copula is strictly independent.

<i>bayto yo</i>	ڤا ڤا
<i>rabo no</i>	ڤا ڤا
<i>nacime hatu</i>	ڤا ڤا
<i>baytoyo yo</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا
<i>rabo yo</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا
<i>rabo hat</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا

The expressions *báyto yo* “it is a house” and *baytóyo* “domestic” and *dáyro yo* “it is a monastery” and *dayróyo* “a monk” have to be written differently.

Passed forms of the copula are independent as well:

wa / wo, wayt / wox, wayno / wi, wayne / wēn, waytu / woxu , wayna

ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا / ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا / ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا، ڤا

<i>bu bayto wa</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا
<i>bu bayto wayno</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا
<i>bu bayto wayt</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا
<i>rabo wa</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا

<i>rabo wayt</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا
<i>bu bayto wox</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا
<i>ono wi</i>	ڤا ڤا
<i>hat wayt</i>	ڤا ڤا ڤا

Exception:

Already lexicalized words like: *mēnyo* ڤا ”what?, what is it/she/he?”),

basyo ڤا “enough!”, *qayyo* ڤا “why?”

6. Post positive demonstratives and possessive suffixes

The post-positive demonstratives and possessive suffixes are attached to the noun they refer to, not separated.

a) The demonstratives (Proximal deixis):

<i>U baytano</i> (this house)	أه كَلَّهْا
<i>Ab botani</i> (these houses)	أه كَلَّهْ
<i>Ab botanĕk</i> (those houses)	أه كَلَّهْپ

With the copula added:

I qriṭate yo (it is this village) اه كَلَّهْا مَ

b) Distal deixis:

<i>u baytawo</i>	أه كَلَّهْا
<i>i qriṭayo</i>	أه كَلَّهْا مَ
<i>ab botanĕk</i>	أه كَلَّهْپ

c) The possessive suffixes:

<i>u baytayḍi</i> (my house)	أه كَلَّهْپ
<i>u baytayḍan</i> (our house)	أه كَلَّهْپ
<i>baytan</i> (our house)	كَلَّهْپ

With the copula added:

u baytayḍi yo (it is my house) اه كَلَّهْپ مَ

7. Object suffixes

In Surayt we have different possibilities of object marking. The object markers of the ergative inflection (past tense) are incorporated to the forms and have to be written as follows:

a) Incorporated object:

<i>mḥalaqle</i> = he threw (him)	ጠሕላቅሎ
<i>mḥalaqwayle</i> = he had thrown (him)	ጠሕላቅወይሎ
<i>mḥalaqwole</i>	ጠሕላቅወሎ
<i>nšəqwayle</i> = he had kissed (him)	ነሕሻቅወይሎ
<i>nšəqwole</i>	ነሕሻቅወሎ
<i>nšəqlewa</i>	ነሕሻቅወሎ

b) The object suffixes:

In this case, too, object suffixes can be seen as part of the verb, (exactly like the possessive suffixes) and should be attached to the verb form.

<i>mḥalaqleli</i> (he threw me / he threw (it) to me)	ጠሕላቅሎሊ
<i>mḥalaqlale</i> (she threw (it) to him)	ጠሕላቅሎሊ

In this, our discussion is not yet finished. In general, it has been accepted to separate the object marker. Compare the following examples:

hiwowalle (they had given her) ስዊወወሎ

but

hiwowa alle (she was given to them) ስዊወሎ ስዊወሎ

and

mḥalaqqalle (they threw (it) to him) ጠሕላቅሎሊ

mḥalaqwalle (they had thrown (him)) ጠሕላቅወሎ

but

mḥalaqwalle ele (they had thrown to him) ጠሕላቅወሎ ስዊወሎ

8. Conservative or progressive writing?

We discussed this topic very intensively and presented many cases, but could not come to an acceptable final solution.

The question of progressive or conservative writing cannot be solved yet. It is an ongoing process; we will have to deal with it in several future meetings.

9. Tempus marker

(1) Prefix **ko-** (in Midyat (M) only **k-**). It stays at the beginning of the present base of verb inflection to show the **present tense**:

<i>kosoyam</i>	كُصَّيْمَر
<i>kosoyamno</i>	كُصَّيْمَرِنَا
<i>kosaymat</i>	كُصَّيْمَرْتَا
<i>etc.</i>	

In Midyat (M), when the verb begins with two consonant mħalëq, than *kë-*

<i>këmħalëq</i>	كَمَّحَلَّيْمَر
<i>këmħalqat</i>	كَمَّحَلَّيْمَرْتَا
<i>etc.</i>	

(2) The future marker is **gëd**. It remains independent and is never linked to the verb:

<i>gëd soyam</i>	گِيد كُصَّيْمَر
<i>gëd saymat</i>	گِيد كُصَّيْمَرْتَا
<i>gëd mħalëq</i>	گِيد كَمَّحَلَّيْمَر
<i>etc.</i>	

Verbs with a vowel at the beginning, like *oxal* “to eat”

<i>gëd oxal</i>	گِيد اُصَّيْمَر
<i>etc.</i>	

10. Negation (*lo, lë*) and Relative pronoun *d* (+ article, + preposition)

A preposition (or the particle *d*) with negation is written separately in Roman characters:

d lo, w lo, b lo mede.

d lo goraš ڤلا گوراش

d Be Zaytën ڤا زایتین

nafiqina b mede w nafiqina ste b lo mede. نایقینا ب مده و نایقینا سته ب لومده.

Exceptions are words with initial vowel:

d lobat ڤلوات

Or: *d lo obat* ڤلا اوبات

d loṭat ڤلا لوات

Or: *d lo oṭat* ڤلا اولوات

Both “*d lobat*” and “*d lo obat*” are acceptable. It all depends on the writers how they want to emphasize the words.

12. Past marker (*wa/wo*)

(3a) The morpheme *wa* (-way-) to mark the past is suffixed (partly inserted) to the verb forms in present:

domaxwa ڤوماکسوا

dëmxëtwa ڤدمختوا

domaxwayno ڤوماکسوانو

dëmxïwa ڤدمختوا

dëmxïtuwa ڤدمختوتوا

dëmxïwayna ڤدمختوانا

In preterite it is always inserted to the inflected verb form:

nšëqwayle نیشقوولمه

nšëqwaylux نیشقوولمخ

nšëqwayli نیشقوولم

<i>nšëqwalle</i>	نِشَاقَالِه
<i>nšëqwalxu</i>	نِشَاقَالِح
<i>nšëqwaylan</i>	نِشَاقَالِان

With object suffixes attached:

<i>mḥalaqwalle ele</i>	مَحَلَاقَالِهْ اَلِهْ
<i>hiwowalle</i>	هِيْوَوَالِهْ
<i>hiwowa alle</i>	هِيْوَوَا اَلِهْ

13. Inflectional suffixes

The inflectional suffixes of the preterite are attached to the base, never written separate:

<i>nšëqle</i>	نِشَاقَلِهْ
<i>nšëqlax</i>	نِشَاقَلِحْ
<i>nšëqqe</i>	نِشَاقَقِهْ

The same rule applies for inflectional suffixes of the present:

<i>domaxno</i>	دُمَاخِنُوْ
<i>dëmxina</i>	دِمَخِنَاْ
<i>dëmxitu</i>	دِمَخِنَاهْ
<i>dëmxat</i>	دِمَخِنَاْ

14. Pronominal suffixes

They stand for the accusative, but also for the dative object. They look like the inflectional suffixes of the preterite (see above 9). Pronominal suffixes can be seen as part of the verb, (exactly like the possessive suffixes) and should be attached to the verb form.

1) Present

<i>konošaqlə</i>	كُونُوشَاقْلَه
or:	كُونُوشَاقْلَه
<i>konəšqatli</i>	كُونُوشَاقْلَه
or:	كُونُوشَاقْلَه
<i>komħalaqlə</i>	كُونُوشَاقْلَه
or:	كُونُوشَاقْلَه
<i>komħalqatle</i>	كُونُوشَاقْلَه
or:	كُونُوشَاقْلَه

2) Imperfect

<i>nošaqlə</i>	نُوشَاقْلَه
not:	نُوشَاقْلَه
<i>nošaqləli</i>	نُوشَاقْلَه
not:	نُوشَاقْلَه
<i>mħalaqlə</i>	مُوشَاقْلَه
not:	مُوشَاقْلَه
<i>mħalqatli</i>	مُوشَاقْلَه
not:	مُوشَاقْلَه

3) Preterite

<i>nšəqləlux</i>	نُوشَاقْلَه
or:	نُوشَاقْلَه
<i>nəqləli</i>	نُوشَاقْلَه
or:	نُوشَاقْلَه
<i>mħalaqləlux</i>	مُوشَاقْلَه
or:	مُوشَاقْلَه
<i>mħalaqləli</i>	مُوشَاقْلَه
or:	مُوشَاقْلَه

4) Plupreterite

<i>nšëqwaylelux</i>	بِعَمَّ مَلَّهْ
or:	بِعَمَّ مَلَّهْ حَهْ
not:	بِعَمَّ مَلَّهْ كَهْ
<i>nšëqwayluxli</i>	بِعَمَّ مَلَّهْ جَل
or:	بِعَمَّ مَلَّهْ جَل حَهْ
not:	بِعَمَّ مَلَّهْ جَل كَهْ
<i>mḥalaqwaylelux</i>	مَحَلَّهْ مَلَّهْ
or:	مَحَلَّهْ مَلَّهْ حَهْ
not:	مَحَلَّهْ مَلَّهْ كَهْ
<i>mḥalaqwayluxli</i>	مَحَلَّهْ مَلَّهْ جَل
or:	مَحَلَّهْ مَلَّهْ جَل حَهْ
not:	مَحَلَّهْ مَلَّهْ جَل كَهْ

15. Relative pronoun (+ article, + preposition)

See above under (9)

16. Analytic writing – contracted (*qayëm* vs. *qam*)

We agreed that contracted forms are more common in oral communication and think that they could be avoided in the written form.

qōm = *qoyëm* قَوْمُ : قَوْمِ

qām = *qayëm* قَوْمٌ : قَوْمِي

sōm = *soyëm* سَوْمُ : سَوْمِي

17. Punctuation

The period/dot and comma to be used the same as in Latin.

وَأَمَّا :
؟
!
، وَا :
؛ وَا :
:

18. Gemination

A *shadda* (Arabic sign for gemination ّ) shall not be used.

Assimilation /r + l/

mërle, mëlle	“he said”	قَالَ
<i>but</i> mëlle, mëlla	“nation”	مَلَكَة مَلَكَة
mërre	“they said”	قَالُوا
mërlèn	“they said”	قَالُوا

Final remarks:

Final *e* as part of the inflectional suffix for 3.m./f. and 3.pl. in verbal forms has to be written with *rbošo* and *he*.

Each main sentence starts with a capital letter. Proper names, names of countries are written in capital letters. Names of peoples and languages however, are written with small letters. Some adverbs have fixed forms and are written accordingly:

<i>adlalyo</i>	أَدْلَالِي
<i>adšato</i>	أَدْشَاتِي
<i>adhōlo</i>	أَدْهُولِي
<i>adnaqla</i>	أَدْنَقْلِي
<i>annaqla</i>	أَنْقَلِي
<i>annaqqa</i>	أَنْقَقِي

Table 1
The Surayt Alphabet
According to the LATIN Order

Aa	arnuwo	ᲀ	ᲀᲠᲟᲛᲟ	ᲀ
Bb	bayto		ᲀᲠᲟ	ᲁ
Cc	cezo		ᲀᲠᲟ	ᲂ
Čč	čanta		ᲀᲠᲟ	ᲃ
Dd	dawmo		ᲀᲠᲟ	ᲄ
Ḑḑ	ḑabco		ᲀᲠᲟ	ᲅ
Ḑḑ	ḑabēlto		ᲀᲠᲟ	ᲆ
Ee	emo	ᲀ	ᲀᲠᲟ	ᲇ
Ěě	ěno	ᲀ	ᲀᲠᲟ	ᲈ
Ff	fil		ᲀᲠᲟ	Ᲊ
Gg	gamlo		ᲀᲠᲟ	ᲊ
Ġġ	ġamo		ᲀᲠᲟ	᲋
Hh	huryo		ᲀᲠᲟ	᲌
Ḥḥ	ḥmoro		ᲀᲠᲟ	᲍
Ii	niro	ᲀ	ᲀᲠᲟ	᲎
Jj	jazwe		ᲀᲠᲟ	᲏
Kk	kalbo		ᲀᲠᲟ	Ა
Ll	lampa		ᲀᲠᲟ	Ბ

Mm	malko		مَلَكًا	م
Nn	nargo		نَارًا	ن
Oo	oto	وُ	أَبَا	أ
Pp	palto		فَلَا	ف
Qq	qaŝen		مَلْه	م
Rr	riŝo		رِيسَا	ر
Ss	sayfo		صَفَا	ص
Ŝŝ	ŝafono		شُفَا	ش
Ŝŝ	ŝalfo		شَلَا	ش
Tt	taclo		أَطَا	أ
Ṭṭ	ṭayro		أَمْنَا	أ
Ṭṭ	ṭawbo		أَوَا	أ
Uu	zuze	و	أَوَا	و
Vv	villa		صَلَا	ص
Ww	wardo		وَوَا	و
Xx	xuŝa		خَصَا	خ
Yy	yawno		عَمَا	ع
Zz	zuze		زَوَا	ز
Žž	žižo		زُزَا	ز

<p style="text-align: center;">Table 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Surayt Alphabet</p> <p style="text-align: center;">According to the SYRIAC Order</p>				
Aa	arnuwo	ܐܘܢܘܘܐ	ܐܘܢܘܘܐ	ܐ
Bb	bayto		ܒܝܬܘܐ	ܒ
Vv	villa		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Gg	gamlo		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Ġġ	ġamo		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Jj	jazwe		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Dd	dawmo		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Ḍḏ	ḏabēlto		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Hh	huryo		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Ww	wardo		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Zz	zārafe		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Ḥḥ	ḥmoro		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Ṭṭ	ṭayro		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Ḍḏ	ḏabco		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Yy	yawno		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ
Kk	kalbo		ܒܝܠܘܐ	ܒ

Xx	xuša		خُشَا	خ
Ll	lampa		لَمَظَا	ل
Mm	malko		مَلَكَا	م
Nn	nargo		نَرَا	ن
Ss	sayfo		سَافَا	س
Cc	cezo		سَازَا	س
Pp	palto		فَلَاوَا	ف
Ff	fil		فَلَا	ف
Şş	şafono		شَافَا	ش
Qq	qaṭen		قَطَنَا	ق
Rr	rišo		رِشَا	ر
Šš	šalfo		شَالَفَا	ش
Čč	čanta		چَانتَا	چ
Žž	žižo		ژِژَا	ژ
Tt	taclo		تَاطَلَا	ت
Ṭṭ	ṭawbo		طَاوَبَا	ط
Vowels (هَوَلَا)				
Aa	arnuwo	اَ	اَرْنُووَا	اَ
Ää (short a)	gäläbe	اِ	گَالِبَا	اِ

Oo	oṭo	ⲟ̇	ⲟⲧⲟ	ⲟ̇
Ee	emo	ⲉ̇	ⲉⲙⲟ	ⲉ̇
Ěě	ěno	ⲉ̇̅	ⲉⲛⲟ	ⲉ̇̅
Ii	iḏo	ⲓ̇	ⲓⲃⲟ	ⲓ̇
Uu	učli	ⲙ̇	ⲙⲉⲥⲗⲓ	ⲙ̇

Notes:

The Surayt alphabet is provided in two different scripts, namely, Latin and Syriac.

- **Table 1** provides the Surayt alphabet according to the Latin order, and
- **Table 2** follows the Syriac order.

In **Table 2** the vowels are grouped separately according to the Syriac tradition.

- The letters written in **green color** are those which are not to be found in classical Syriac consequently they are either borrowed or in time actively entered the Suryat language from Arabic, Turkish or Kurdish.
- The letters written in **red color** are the vowels or *matres lectionis* (ⲓ̇ ⲙ̇ ⲟ̇).
- The short **ä** (ⲉ̇̅) was agreed to be listed in the Surayt alphabet for future use.