

# A History of the Study of Grammar among the Syrians



## **Perspectives on Linguistics and Ancient Languages**

13

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**A History of the Study of Grammar  
among the Syrians**

**An English translation of  
*Historia artis grammaticae apud Syros***

**By**

**Adalbert Merx**

Translated by

**Daniel King**

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## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

### I. ADALBERT MERX, HIS LIFE AND WORK<sup>1</sup>

Adalbert Merx was born in 1838. His mother, Eulalia, was a novelist of some repute, though not as (in)famous as her sister Louise Aston, a notorious and irrepressible radical, whose views hardly coincided with the far more conservative Protestant tastes of her sister, and of her brother-in-law, Friedrich Wilhelm Merx.

Adalbert studied in a variety of locations (Pforta, Marburg, Halle, Breslau), picking up a number of 'oriental' languages along the way (including Sanskrit, Persian and Ethiopic). After *Habilitation* in Jena in 1865 and an appointment as professor in the same place in 1869, he was invited in the same year to Tübingen to a position as professor of Semitic languages. After a brief stint at Giessen (1873-5), Merx finally became professor of theology at Heidelberg, the university with which he and his family would be associated for many years to come (his mother moved there and died only a year before her son). He made several journeys to the Near East in connection with his developing expertise as an all-round Orientalist, and this in the days of such figures as Theodor Nöldeke. In Heidelberg he was considered something of a polymath and linguistic genius.

Here he came into contact with both Ernst Troeltsch and the latter's close friend and colleague Max Weber. Troeltsch's account of his time in Heidelberg does not present us with a particularly flattering portrait of Merx, calling him vain and pedantic,<sup>2</sup> al it was during the 1890s that the faculty there grew into a significant international establishment. Merx himself must have been a rather stern and unsympathetic figure, perhaps not readily sympathetic to the ideas of the younger sociologists of his day. Despite the breadth of his research and the thoroughness of his arguments, Merx hardly engenders in the reader that same admiration elicited by the ever-relevant and pointed insights of his contemporary Nöldeke.

Besides publishing extensively in Old Testament studies, he was also actively engaged in epigraphy and Targumic studies. His interest in

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<sup>1</sup> For further details and bio-bibliography, see the article by Klaus Breuer in the *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 17, 194-5.

<sup>2</sup> H. Libersohn, *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology 1870-1923* (MIT Pres 1989), p.51

linguistics stemmed from his early textbook on Syriac grammar (1<sup>st</sup> part, 1867) and was brought to full fruition in the present monumental monograph (1889). Towards the end of his career, Merx devoted himself to consideration of the Old Syriac Gospels in the Sinaitic palimpsest, which had been discovered in 1892. His initial results were published in *Die vier kanonischen Evangelien* (1897-1905), with further work completed by his student Julius Ruska. The last work published in his lifetime was a layman's commentary on the Hexateuch. He died suddenly at Heidelberg on the 6th of August 1909 while attending the funeral of a colleague.

As mentioned, Merx's work on the Sinai manuscript was completed by his principal student Julius Ruska, whose principal contribution to Syriac studies was an 1896 edition of part of Jacob Bar Šakko's *Dialogues*. The pupil married the professor's daughter, Elizabeth, and their son Ernst Ruska became somewhat more widely celebrated than his Syriacist father and grandfather on account of his inventing the electron microscope in 1931, for which he was eventually awarded a Nobel Prize in 1938.<sup>1</sup> His brother Helmut also pioneered the use of electron optics in medicine. Merx's other daughter married the Heidelberg astronomer Max Wolf, whose respect for his theologian father-in-law extended to naming a couple of minor planets after him, generally still known as 330 Adalberta and 808 Merxia! Perhaps Wolf held Merx in higher esteem than did Max Weber.

## II. A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MERX'S WRITINGS

*Meletemata Ignatiana. Critica de epistolarum Ignatiarum versione syriaca commentatio* (Halle, 1861). This was Merx's Doctoral dissertation, completed under the arabist F.A. Arnold in Breslau. It demonstrated the importance of the Syriac version of the Ignatian correspondence in establishing the authentic letters.

*Archiv für wissenschaftliche Erforschung des Alten Testaments* (Halle, 1869-72) was a short-lived journal founded and edited by Merx, to which he also contributed a number of items. It was the first real attempt at a journal dedicated to Old Testament studies.

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<sup>1</sup> See the account in Ruska's Nobel Prize Lecture, "The development of the electron microscope and of electron microscopy," *Reviews of Modern Physics* 59 (1987), 627-638, and L. Lambert & T. Mulvey, "Ernst Ruska (1906-1988), Designer Extraordinaire of the Electron Microscope: A Memoir" *Advances in Imaging and Electron Physics* 95 (1996), 2-62.

- “Kritische Untersuchung über die Opfergesetze Lev 1 bis 7,” *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 6,1 (1863), 41-84; 6,2 (1863), 164-82.
- Bardesanes von Edessa. Nebst einer Untersuchung über das Verhältniss der clementinischen Recognitionen zu dem Buche der Gesetze der Länder* (Halle, 1863).
- Cur in libro Danielis iuxta Hebraeam Aramea adhibita sit dialectus explicatur* (Halle, 1865). Merx’s *Habilitation*, which attempts to demonstrate that the Aramaic portions of Daniel were written for the uneducated, whereas the Hebrew parts were meant for the learned.
- Grammatica Syriaca*. 2 parts (Halle, 1867-70). This was in fact a new edition of Andreas Gottlieb Hoffmann’s Syriac Grammar.
- “Die Inschrift von Umm el Awamid I” *ZDMG* 21 (1867), 476-87. Note also the response by M. A. Levy, “Einige Bemerkungen zu des Herrn Dr. Merx Erklärung der Inschrift von Umm-el-Awamid I,” *ZDMG* 22 (1868), 538-41.
- C.M. Von Beurmann, *Vocabulary of the Tigré language, with a grammatical sketch* by A. Merx (London, 1868).
- “Miscellen zur semitischen Lautlehre. Bemerkungen zu Nöldeke’s Beiträgen zur Kenntniss der aramäischen Dialekte,” *ZDMG* 22 (1868), 271-8.
- “Bemerkungen über bis jetzt bekannte aramäische Inschriften,” *ZDMG* 22 (1868), 674-99.
- Das Gedicht von Hiob. Hebräischer Text, kritisch bearbeitet und übersetzt* (Jena, 1871).
- Neusyrisches Lesebuch. Texte im Dialecte von Urmia* (Breslau, 1873).
- Zur Religionsphilosophie: Zwei akademische Reden*. Offprints from *Philosophischen Monatsheften* vols. IV and VII (Giessen, 1875). These offprints may be found in the Bensley library collection in the Cambridge University Library.
- Türkische Sprichwörter ins Deutsche übersetzt* (Venice, 1877; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1893). A collection of 355 Turkish proverbs presented in no particular order and with no accompanying notes or list of sources. Turkish is printed in Armenian characters.
- Die Prophetie des Joel und ihre Ausleger von den ältesten Zeiten bis zu den Reformatoren* (Halle, 1879). Established Joel as post-exilic and developed a theory of the apocalyptic genre and its association with prophecy.
- Eine Rede vom Auslegen insbesondere des Alten Testaments. Vortrag gehalten am 3 Juli 1878* (Halle, 1879).

- Specimina targumica e codicibus Londinensibus et Caroliruhensibus selegit* (Heidelberg, 1881).
- Die Saadjanische Uebersetzung des Hohen Liedes ins Arabische (Heidelberg, 1882).
- “Eröffnungsrede des Präsidenten. Generalversammlung zu Karlsruhe der Deutschen Mogenländischen Gesellschaft,” *ZDMG* 36 (1882), xxxi-xxxix.
- “Proben der syrischen Uebersetzung von Galenus’ Schrift über die einfachen Heilmittel,” *ZDMG* 39 (1885), 237-305. See also the response by I. Löw, “Bemerkungen zu Merx, Proben der syrischen Übersetzung von Galenus’ Schrift über die einfachen Heilmittel,” *ZDMG* 40 (1886), 763-5.
- “De artis Dionysianae interpretatione Armeniaca,” in G. Uhlig, ed., *Dionysii Thracis ars grammatical. Grammatici Graeci 1.1* (Leipzig, 1883), lvii-lxxiii.
- “Johannes Buxtorf’s des Vaters Targumcommentar Babylonia,” *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 30 (1887), 280-99, 462-71; 31 (1888), 42-8.
- “Bemerkungen über die Vocalization der Targume,” in *Verhandlungen des fünften internationalen Orientalisten-Congresses II, Abhandlungen und Vorträge* (Berlin, 1881-2), 142-88.
- Chrestomathia Targumica quam collatis libris manuscriptis antiquissimimis tiberiensibusque impressis celeberrimis. E codicibus ad codices vocalibus babylonis instructis* (Berlin, 1888).
- Historia artis grammaticae apud Syros* (Leipzig, 1889).
- Über die heutigen Aufgaben des Evangelischen Bundes. Rede, zu Mannheim 1892 gehalten (Leipzig, 1892).
- Die Ideen von Staat und Staatsmann im Zusammenhange mit der geschichtlichen Entwicklung der Menschheit.* Festrede zur Feier des vierzigjährigen Regierungsjubiläums Seiner Königlichen Hoheit des Grossherzogs Friedrich von Baden gehalten in der Aula der Universität Heidelberg am 28. April 1892 (Heidelberg, 1892).
- Idee und Grundlinien einer allgemeinen Geschichte der Mystik.* Akademische Rede zum Geburtsfeste des höchstseligen Grossherzogs Karl Friedrich am 22. November 1892 beim Vortrage des Jahresberichtes und der Verkündung der akademischen Preise gehalten (Heidelberg, 1893).
- Documents de paléographie hébraïque et arabe* (Leiden, 1894).
- “Die in der Peschito fehlenden Briefe des Neuen Testaments in arabischer der Philoxeniana entstammender Uebersetzung,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 12 (1897), 348-381.
- Die vier kanonischen Evangelien nach ihrem ältesten bekannten Texte. Übersetzung und Erläuterung der syrischen im Sinaikloster gefundenen*

*Palimpsesthandschriften* (Berlin, 1897-1911). Each gospel was published in its own fascicle which are sometimes found separately. See the comments on Merx's work in L. Vaganay, *L'évangile de Pierre*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris, 1930), 268-71.

Aus Muallim Nadschi's *Sünbüle : die Geschichte seiner Kindheit* (trans.) (Berlin, 1898).

"Collation of the Armenian Text," in *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius in Syriac*, ed. W. Wright and N. McLean (Cambridge, 1898).

"Die Schlussmassora aus dem Cairiner Codex vom Jahre 1028," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 14, 293-330.

*Die morgenländischen Studien und Professuren an der Universität Heidelberg vor und besonders im 19. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg, 1903).

*Die Bücher Moses und Josua. Eine Einführung für Laien. Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher für die deutsche christliche Gegenwart* (Tübingen, 1907).

*Der Messias oder Ta'eb der Samaritaner* (Giessen, 1909).

"Le rôle du foie dans la littérature des peuples sémitiques," in *Florilegium, ou recueil de travaux d'érudition dédiés a Monsieur le Marquis Melchior de Vogüé* (Paris, 1909).

### III. THE *HISTORIA ARTIS GRAMMATICAE* IN SUBSEQUENT RESEARCH

Theodor Nöldeke praised Merx's monograph as "eine wirkliche Förderung der Wissenschaft."<sup>1</sup> Although he was not averse to suggesting a number of improvements on matters of detail, the great orientalist concurred with the basic direction and burden of Merx's research. Nöldeke's comments, as well as specific remarks or criticism voiced by other scholars over the years are mentioned as they arise in the endnotes of the current edition. It may be useful at this point, however, to describe and survey briefly the directions taken by the post-Merx discussion on a few key issues raised by the book. Especially in view here is the question of various cultural influences in the area of language and grammar. The possible influence of Greek grammar upon its Syriac counterpart; the (suggested) influence of the Syriac system of accentuation and vocalisation upon the Hebrew masoretic traditions; and perhaps above all the question of the origins of Arabic grammar and Merx's claim to have uncovered its *Grundlage* in late antique Aristotelian logic.

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<sup>1</sup> Nöldeke, Review, 1220.

Seeing as any assertion of the influence of one cultural sphere upon another seems to attract a more than representative quantity of suspicion, it may be as well to set out for the modern reader at least a broad overview of these questions as they have developed since 1889, only partly of course in response to Merx, who was hardly the first to have broached these sometimes sensitive topics.

*The influence of Greek upon Syriac points and accents*

Merx believed firmly that Syriac accentuation (those points in the text that mark sense division and rhetorical features) was but an offshoot of the late antique system of Greek punctuation. This theory of origins is set out as follows: Merx begins by explaining the Greek system of three types of basic ‘point’ used for the internal division of the sentence, making use of Dionysius Thrax’s *Technē* and its scholia (p.63-4).<sup>1</sup> He then proceeds to show that this is exactly the same system that one sees in the earliest dated Syriac manuscript (p.65-6). From these basic beginnings there developed (on internal impulses) the rather better known system of four logical accents for dividing a verse, namely *šewāyā*, *taḥtāyā*, *‘alāyā*, and *pasōqā*, a pattern of which he gives an example taken from a manuscript of John of Ephesus, dated 688 (p.67). Joseph Huzaya, the sixth century master from the School of Nisibis, further elaborated this system by adding to these ‘logical’ accents what Merx calls ‘rhetorical’ accents (i.e. those designed to indicate kinds of sentences, e.g. questions or commands). This again was an inner-Syriac development. After an excursus on Hebrew pointing (p.69-77, for which see below), he goes on to detail (p.77-81) how Jacob of Edessa added a number of further rhetorical accents to those of Joseph, thereby creating an even more sophisticated system. This was not an internal development, however, for Jacob was also heavily indebted to the Greek tradition—in the first place to the *Technē* again, to which we owe the distinction of mimetic and temporal accents, but also to later Greek grammarians, especially Nicanor, whose specific influence upon Jacob is worked out (p.81-8). The Greek elements in Jacob’s system include such features as giving different temporal accents precise quantities for indicating different pausal lengths, the use of the Greek hyphen (Syriac *garōra*), further precision amongst different types of the basic point, and

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<sup>1</sup> Page nos. refer to the original edition, which are marked with a bar, as e.g. |<sup>54</sup>

points for marking unexpected inversions of word order. This lengthy discussion is followed by a reconstruction (p.89-100) of the section in Jacob's *Grammar* that dealt with accents, on the basis of his other works (especially the *Letter on Orthography*) and from Jacob Bar Šakko, who seems to be dependent upon his namesake of Edessa.

The theory as explained by Merx is neither simple nor unilinear. It is important above all to note that he postulates two major moments of Greek influence, an original one which gave rise to the very earliest system of Syriac pointing, and a later, rather more sophisticated, one in which Jacob of Edessa used his knowledge of the later Greek grammatical tradition to 'update' the native system which he had inherited from Joseph Huzaya. Merx further alludes (p.101) to the Greek influence upon the intermediate system of Thomas the Deacon, which is especially notable in the latter's discussion of the *garōra* (p.73,84).

On the basis of a thoroughgoing analysis of Barhebraeus's *Grammar*, Axel Moberg staged a point-by-point refutation of Merx's argument.<sup>1</sup> According to Moberg, who went on to edit and translate Barhebraeus's *Grammar*, the main problems with Merx's discussion about the development and origins of the Syriac accentuation system are as follows:

- The derivation of the pointing system contained in the earliest dated Syriac manuscript from Dionysius's *Technē* requires that the latter's 'mid-point' developed into the Syriac *pasōqā*. Yet the former is clearly a type of 'rhetorical' accent in Dionysius rather than a piece of punctuation. It is thus far-fetched to imagine that this less significant mark developed into the most fundamental Syriac accent.
- Merx fails to demonstrate any clear parallel between Nicanor and Jacob. Why, for instance, does Jacob not adopt Nicanor's other symbols, and why does Jacob have a series of accents that have no parallel at all in Nicanor? In essence, Nicanor cannot account for the basic structure of Jacob's system.
- The distinction among the rhetorical accents between those that are mimetic (sense accents) and those that indicate pauses (temporal accents) is apparently based on the Dionysian expressions *καθ' ὑπόκρισιν* and *κατὰ διαστολήν*. The latter, however, has already

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<sup>1</sup> A. Moberg, "Über den griechischen Ursprung der syrischen Akzentuation," *Le Monde oriental* 1 (1906), 87-99.



which therefore influenced the Syriac, since Huzaya belongs to the mid/late sixth century.

Once Moberg enters into the details of the two systems (97-8) he finds the evidence rather less conclusive. Undeterred by such details, however, he maintains that ‘es ist die prinzipielle identität, auf welche es hier ankommt’ (98). Although he refers to two Syriac mss which have Greek musical notation written onto them (one mentioned by J. Thibaut, “Étude de musique Byzantine” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 8 (1899), 145; the other by Merx, 82), these are most likely the result of late combinations of Syriac language and Byzantine notation, and prove nothing about the origins of either.<sup>1</sup>

Moving on from Moberg’s critique of Merx and his alternative thesis, we encounter Weiss’s study, *Zur ostsyrischen Laut- und Akzentlehre*. This offers a useful overview, with plenty of examples provided, of the accentual system used in the famous East Syriac Masorah (Add. 12138), but adds nothing to the discussion of origins.

The next landmark is Segal’s seminal work of 1953, *The diacritical point and the accents in Syriac*, deviates in a number of ways from previous scholarship. Firstly, he insists that the study of the accents must begin from the mss themselves and “what the reader sees,” rather than with the lists produced by grammarians (p.61). In fact, Moberg had already made this point in his 1908 article, but Segal carries it through with greater rigour and success.

On the subject of Greek influence, Segal made the important point that the Syrians themselves regularly attributed the invention of the accents to the Greeks and that this in itself should not be taken seriously.<sup>2</sup> For instance, when Barhebraeus says that Syriac and Greek are the only languages to have accents (a well-known citation used by Merx, Duval, and Moberg), he is so clearly in the wrong (by omitting Hebrew) that one can hardly accept what he, or anyone else, says about the origins of Syriac accents.

In response to the arguments put forward by Merx and Moberg in support of Greek origins, however, Segal simply states rather (p.63) that

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<sup>1</sup> The first of the mss Moberg never saw – it is a facsimile of an unidentified ms still in the Middle East, the other is a ms in Dresden.

<sup>2</sup> Both Epiphanius and Aristotle were claimed as the originators of the idea, although other traditions, especially in the East, preferred to ascribe them to Joseph Huzaya.

“we may assume a native Syrian origin for the accents,” on the basis that the system is straightforward and, as it were, required by the nature of things, such that it would have occurred without external prompting. The parallels demonstrated by Moberg between the Syriac accents and the Greek *neuma* system are, he says, “no greater than might be expected from their common *raison d’être*.”

Segal thus raises the possibility of the self-origination of the system on the basis that external influence is not a *necessity*. Of course, this falls well short of demonstrating that Merx and Moberg were wrong. The argument, for instance, that the *pasōqā* must be a native development because it appears in other Semitic languages, begs the question since these other systems are most likely derived from Syriac in any case. Segal does suggest in a footnote, however, that if there is a relationship between Greek and Syriac it may be the other way.

The question of the origin and the development of Greek *ekphonic* notation should probably be brought into the centre of this discussion. Its similarity to the earlier Syriac accentuation system is clear for all to see—both grew out of basic Greek prose punctuation and were designed for the semi-chanted reading of the scriptures.<sup>1</sup> Whether the dating of the oldest Greek *ekphonic* system allows for it to have exerted any influence upon the Syriac remains to be seen.<sup>2</sup> The earliest manuscripts bearing these symbols belong to the ninth century, although the names and functions of the *ekphonic* symbols imply that their origin lies much further back as a development from Greek prosodic punctuation as it is described in the late antique handbooks.

Greek musical notation from the Roman imperial era has been discovered in a number of papyri. The notes tend to consist of letter-like symbols for the most part, though in a number of cases points are also used to indicate rhythm rather than melody. Similar systems were in use for

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<sup>1</sup> E. Wellesz, *Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford, 1961), 249-60, describes the system with examples. He backs a fourth century dating for their invention (p.246), although the mss are of course considerably younger, not pre-dating the eleventh century. The *ekphonic* system is to be distinguished from the *neumes* proper, which really refer to the fully melodic Byzantine system of notation used from about the ninth or tenth century.

<sup>2</sup> G. Engberg, art. “Ekphonic Notation,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol.8, 47-51.

traditional religions and for Christian hymns.<sup>1</sup> It was thus reasonably common among Greek-speaking Christian groups to mark up their manuscripts with a basic musical notation. It has been suggested that an unusual pointing system found on some Greek papyri (including a Psalter) are in reality a basic (pre-*ekphonic*) form of musical notation and that the patterns of points used are so similar to the Syriac as to make a genetic relationship more than likely.<sup>2</sup> If correct, this thesis, although as yet not fully worked out, would clinch the argument for Hellenogenesis. On the other hand, a careful comparative study of the Greek *ekphonic* system with the Hebrew accentuation has shown no necessary genetic relationship, but rather suggests that Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac systems all arose out of a basic chanting system for the scriptures which developed independently in each case.<sup>3</sup> Knowledge of the very earliest Greek systems is probably insufficiently detailed to allow a clear answer to emerge at present. Given the constant interaction between Greek and Syriac literary and religious spheres in the two to three centuries before Islam, we may well have to do here with an ongoing relationship between related phenomena.

Merx's theory of the influence of Greek interpunction upon the earliest stages of the Syriac tradition was later upheld against Segal's scepticism, on the basis of a fresh and more nuanced reading of the earliest dated Syriac manuscript.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the influence of Greek theory upon Jacob of Edessa, and probably also upon Thomas the Deacon and others, is admitted even by Segal (p.120f., at least for the West Syrian 'rhetorical' accents; the East followed its own, more 'musical' course, p.80f.), whether this came directly by way of Nicanor (as Merx) or from elsewhere. On the

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<sup>1</sup> For the former see P.Oxy 2436; for the latter P. Oxy 1786. Further examples may be found in *Symbolae Osloenses* xxxi (1955), 1-98, and in O.M. Pearl and R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "A Michigan Papyrus with musical notation," *J. of Egyptian Archaeology* 51 (1965), 179-95.

<sup>2</sup> D. Jourdan-Hemmerdinger, "Nouveaux fragments musicaux sur papyrus (une notation antique par points)," in M. Velimirovic, ed., *Studies in Eastern Chant*, vol.IV (London, 1979), 81-111.

<sup>3</sup> E. J. Revell, "Hebrew Accents and Greek Ekphonic Neumes," in Velimirovic, op.cit., 140-70.

<sup>4</sup> F. Stanley Jones, "Early Syriac Pointing in and behind British Museum Additional Manuscript 12,150," in R. Lavenant, ed., *Symposium Syriacum VII* (Rome, 1998), 429-444.

most significant question, however, namely that of the absolute origin of Syriac accentuation, the balance still seems to lie with Hellenogenesis, especially in light of the above-noted observations of Stanley Jones. The strongest argument to the contrary remains Moberg's point that the Syriac system was always about declamatory-rhetorical effects rather than interpunction as such, and Merx's reading of the early Edessan manuscript relies on interpunction being the original purpose of the points.

*The influence of Syriac upon Hebrew points and accents*

While the idea that Syriac accents may have been an influence upon Greek systems remains a rather remote possibility, the thesis of Syriac influence upon Hebrew is almost a matter of dogma. Such a theory was first propounded by Ewald, and to this day basic textbooks still repeat Merx's assertion that the Hebrew vocalisations and accents took their origin from the Syrians.<sup>1</sup> Even in Merx's day, however, not all were so certain.<sup>2</sup> More recently one of the most prominent experts on the Hebrew Masorah has shown a great deal of scepticism by demonstrating how the Hebrew accentual system is a separate beast from the system used for its vowel signs;<sup>3</sup> moreover, the internal evidence of Hebrew literature provides us with no firm *terminus post quem* for the former, which may have been mentioned in the Talmud and have originated significantly earlier. Dotan prefers to attribute the Hebrew system to internal impulses and sees no need to postulate a Syriac influence, which in some specific cases at least

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<sup>1</sup> E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, 2001), 40, following Gesenius-Kautzsch §7h, who in turn is following the orthodoxy of Geiger and Merx, and ultimately of Ewald. The dictum is even incorporated into wider accounts of Semitics, e.g. E. Lipinski, *Semitic Languages. Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (Leuven, 2001), 164 (also for Arabic, 169). Other accounts are more descriptive and do not dare venture into the issue of historical origins, e.g. S. Morag, *The Vocalization Systems of Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic: their phonetic and phonemic principles* ('s-Gravenhage, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Phillips, *Accents*, 222-3.

<sup>3</sup> A. Dotan, "The relative chronology of the Hebrew vocalization and accentuation," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 48 (1981), 87-99; id., "Masorah," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1972), Vol.16, col.1415-6, §2.1.3 (reprinted in 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2007, Vol.13, 613).

the evidence appears to refute.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of Segal's reconstruction of the history of the East Syrian vowel notation, he suggests influence rather in the opposite direction.<sup>2</sup> As the author concedes, however, a much fuller investigation is required if a firm solution to the problem is to be found. On the question of dating, he is at least on the same ground as Merx; it seems certain that the Hebrew system did not develop until after c.500 and was largely accomplished by c.700. This period does of course coincide with the formative age of the Syriac Masorah (and possibly of the Greek *ekphonic* system, see above). The Hebrew Masorah as an oral tradition of recitation, on the other hand, is of much greater antiquity than this. It should be borne in mind that the question of influence concerns only the notation and not the chanting itself. The latter was in existence in a form broadly anticipating its later developments already in the second century BC.<sup>3</sup>

Merx's own argument for mutual dependence in general and for Syriac priority in particular is found in the midst of his discussion of Syriac pointing (p.69-77). In line with most scholars of his day, Merx believed that Hebrew accentuation was primarily designed for logical verse division and that melodic considerations were secondary. He attempts to demonstrate, however, that within the constraints of the logical system, choice was exercised on a melodic basis. He goes on to parallel the Hebrew and Syriac systems, starting from such basic observations as the similarity of names among the key accents (pasōqā = pasōq; athnaḥ = taḥtāyā). Once he has dealt with the broad similarity of the logical accents in both systems, he goes on to show that there are some traces even of rhetorical accents in Hebrew. As Dotan, Merx believes that the Hebrew accents preceded the Hebrew vowel notation (p.76). He concludes that the Hebrews borrowed the older form of the Syriac system before it was developed by Thomas the Deacon (c.600) and Jacob of Edessa.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., §4.1.1.2, §4.3.2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., §5.2.1.1.2.

<sup>3</sup> E.J. Revell, "The Oldest Evidence for the Hebrew Accent System," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 54 (1971/2), 214-22.

*The Greek and Syriac influences upon Arabic grammar*

In the ninth chapter of his work, Merx deals with a subject only tangentially related to his main theme but which has become a focal point for controversy and debate to the present day, namely the question of the origins of Arabic grammar. Merx raises this question at this point in his monograph at just the point when he is about to embark upon the work of Elias of Ṭirhan, the first Syriac grammarian who sought to use Arabic grammatical theory to underpin his analysis of Syriac.

In the first instance, Merx quickly dismisses the notion that Arabic grammar was itself derivative from the Syriac. There are parallels, but these arise merely from the common problems with which both traditions were faced. Similarly, the influence of the Greek grammatical tradition is also ultimately of little value as an explanatory factor due to the general discontinuity between the two theories, their terminology, basic principles etc. It is, however, in the field of Greek logic that Merx finds the antecedents he seeks. He argues that the elaborate Aristotelian commentary tradition of late antiquity was adopted by the Arabs, and its principles were applied to the study of language, giving rise to the great edifice we know as the Arabic grammatical tradition. Merx especially demonstrates (p.141-8) this genetic relationship through a study of Arabic grammatical terminology, in particular 1) the use of the three parts of speech (noun, verb, particle; here he adds pertinent observations about Sībawayhi's analysis of tense); 2) the derivation of the notion of *'irāb* from *hellenismos*; 3) the odd Arabic way of explaining gender in nouns; 4) the origin and meaning of the term *zarf*, related to aspects of Aristotle's *Physics*;<sup>1</sup> 5) the same for *ḥāl*, related to Greek *diathesis* in its philosophical sense; 6) the use of logical predicate for grammatical subject. He goes on to show that much of the developed Arabic grammar was *not* based on Greek equivalents, whether in Aristotle's *Poetics* or elsewhere (e.g. the names for the cases are unrelated). In this, then, the Arab genius was its own.

The debate over this hypothesis variously moved back and forth over the next century, its most significant opponent being Josef Weiss, whereas

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<sup>1</sup> A suggestion that is 'unverifiable' according to Michael Carter, EI<sup>2</sup>, XI,459a, though this may be true of most theories of origins that have to work with limited evidence.

Nöldeke was a supporter.<sup>1</sup> It also received a stout defence in an article by Rundgren, who defended the older idea that Arabic grammar might have derived from Greek philosophy, calling especially upon the form of the logical tradition that is found in the Syriac commentators Proba and Paul the Persian.<sup>2</sup> This elicited a lengthy rejoinder from Elamrani-Jamal, who took on the Merx theory in full debate in his 1983 monograph, *Logique aristotélicienne et Grammaire arabe*, in which he argued that the hypothesis of Greek origins was grounded in colonialist prejudice against the capacity of Semitic cultures to produce science or philosophy by their own momentum.<sup>3</sup> Elamrani-Jamal interacts directly with many of Merx's arguments, although his work does suffer from its interacting almost exclusively with a summary article that Merx wrote on the subject in 1892 rather than with the fuller exposition in the *Historia Artis Grammaticae*. He also misunderstands Merx in at least one respect, viz. he takes Merx to be arguing that Arab grammarians took their ideas from Aristotle, to which Elamrani-Jamal objects that the Arabic translations of Aristotle had not yet begun in Sībawayhi's day. Merx is quite clear, however, that it is the Alexandrian commentary tradition through which such knowledge was transmitted to Arabic thinkers (Merx, 141). Nonetheless, his substantive criticisms of the Merx thesis stand as a vital contribution to the debate.

Elamrani-Jamal also included within his broader critique of this stream of scholarship, a number of other works which, while not suffering from all of Merx's faults, were nevertheless inheritors of his basic thesis, chief among these being Versteegh's 1977 work, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking*, which took hold of the Merx thesis and developed some of its stronger aspects in a number of directions.<sup>4</sup>

In more recent years, Versteegh has significantly advanced the whole subject by a much more thorough consideration of the importance of Qur'ānic exegesis in early Arabic grammar (a point that Merx did himself make quite forcefully). His more balanced assessment can therefore be

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<sup>1</sup> J. Weiss, "Die arabische Nationalgrammatik und die Lateiner," *ZDMG* 64 (1910), 349-90; for Nöldeke's mature opinion, *ZDMG* 59 (1905), 414.

<sup>2</sup> F. Rundgren, *Über den griechischen Einfluss auf die arabische Nationalgrammatik*, *Acta Societatis Linguisticae Upsaliensis*, Nova series 2,5 (1976): 119-44.

<sup>3</sup> A. Elamrani-Jamal, *Logique aristotélicienne et Grammaire arabe*. Paris: Vrin, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> K. Versteegh, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking*. Studies in Semitic Language and Linguistics VII. Leiden: Brill, 1977.

found in his *Arabic Grammar and Quranic Exegesis in Early Islam* of 1997,<sup>1</sup> which also incorporates other important work done in the meantime, such as Talmon's research on the pre-Sibawayhi era and the possible links between the early Kufan school and Greek logic.<sup>2</sup> Talmon has also made a number of suggestions of influence from the Syriac side, especially in the field of punctuation and orthography.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Michael Carter has highlighted the close resemblances between the realms of grammar and law in Arabic literature and suggests the legal realm as the locus in which grammar arose,<sup>4</sup> and Troupeau has argued against Merx on the ground that the language of the first Arabic philosophers does not match that of the grammarians,<sup>5</sup> though it must be borne in mind that the former rediscovered Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias whereas the grammarians, if they were indebted at all to Greek logic, were rather part of the late antique pedagogical commentary tradition.

This remains a very difficult area in which to arrive at any firm conclusion, partly due to a lack of edited or extant texts (in both Syriac and Arabic) and partly due to the issues of cultural colonialism which underlie much of the debate. I have discussed all this elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> and the reader is referred to that article for further bibliographic details and a consideration of what research in the Syriac grammatical tradition might be able to contribute.

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<sup>1</sup> id. *Arabic Grammar and Quranic Exegesis in Early Islam*. Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics XIX. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Through a number of his articles, and the monographs *Arabic grammar in its formative age* (Leiden, 1994), and *Eighth-century Iraqi grammar* (Eisenbrauns, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> See the articles mentioned in the bibliography below.

<sup>4</sup> M.G. Carter, "The Origins of Arabic Grammar," in R. Baalbaki (ed.), *The Early Islamic Grammatical Tradition* (Ashgate, 2007), 1-26.

<sup>5</sup> G. Troupeau, "La logique d'Ibn al-Muqaffa' et les origines de la grammaire arabe," *Arabica* 28 (1981), 242-50.

<sup>6</sup> D. King, "Elements of the Syriac Grammatical Tradition as these Relate to the Origins of Arabic Grammar," in A. Marogy (ed.), *The Foundations of Arabic Linguistics: Sibawayhi and Early Arabic Grammatical Theory* (Brill: Leiden, 2012), 189-209.

*The Interaction of Logic and Grammar in Syriac Tradition*<sup>1</sup>

The crossover and mutual influence between logic and grammar has a long history in Semitic literature. Ever since Porphyry saved Aristotle from appearing un-platonic by interpreting his *Categories* as being about ‘words’ rather than ‘things’, the commentary tradition began to take special notice of the *De Interpretatione* as being a book apparently about sentences and how they are constructed, i.e. as a sort of grammar. Proba was the main conduit by which the commentary tradition on the *De Interpretatione* was transmitted into Syriac. He is a rather shadowy figure but belongs to the sixth century and may have written in both Greek and Syriac.<sup>2</sup> At any rate, his Syriac commentary on the *De Interpretatione* was well known to Syriac readers of a later age—both Bar Zo’bi and Barhebraeus open their grammars with quotes from the *De Interpretatione* and from Proba’s commentary thereon.

For Proba, Aristotle’s aim in this work is to teach us about ‘speech’ and he goes on to subdivide ‘speech’ into its five categories, question, vocative, request, command, statement (ܩܘܣܩܘܢܐ, ܩܘܣܩܘܢܐ, ܩܘܣܩܘܢܐ, ܩܘܣܩܘܢܐ, ܩܘܣܩܘܢܐ). Proba was evidently read by the earliest Syriac grammarians, for whom these categories of speech corresponded with the mimetic (or sense) accents which they had developed.<sup>3</sup> They thus attributed to Aristotle the invention of these same accents.<sup>4</sup> However, the traditional Aristotelian five parts-of-speech did not match the alternative tradition of ten accents, taught

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<sup>1</sup> This is an extensive topic, only mentioned here in passing. I have outlined the issues in D. King, “Grammar and Logic in Syriac (and Arabic),” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 58 (2013), 101-120, and an analysis of examples in Paul the Persian, Proba, and Athanasius of Balad, has been carried out by H. Hugonnard-Roche, “La tradition du Peri hermeneias d’Aristote en syriaque, entre logique et grammaire,” in M. Farina (ed.), *Les auteurs syriaques et leur langue. Études syriaques* 15. Paris: Geuthner, 2018, 55-94.

<sup>2</sup> S.P. Brock, “The Commentator Probus: Problems of Date and Identity,” in J.W. Watt and J. Lössl (edd.), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity* (Ashgate, 2011), 195-206; H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Le commentaire syriaque de Probus sur l’Isagoge de Porphyre. Une étude préliminaire,” *Studia Graeco-Arabica* 2 (2012): 227-43.

<sup>3</sup> Hoffmann, *Herm*, 66. Merx calls these accents ‘mimetic’; Revell calls them ‘sense accents’. For this, and the following remarks, see his “Aristotle and the Accents: The Categories of Speech in Jewish and other authors,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974), 19-35.

<sup>4</sup> Add 12178, f.232a-234b (Anon A in our list above).

probably in the School of Nisibis and which went back to Joseph Huzaya. Hence we can see here already that eagerness typical of many West Syrian thinkers to attribute all matters pertaining to philosophy and grammar to Greek innovations even when the evidence seems to suggest otherwise.

However, as Revell has shown, this was not merely a matter of imagining Greek antecedents.<sup>1</sup> Rather, the actual elaboration of the accentual system depended upon the commentary tradition of the *De Interpretatione*. For Thomas the Deacon's system introduced, among its numerous new accents, the two Aristotelian categories of speech as yet unrepresented, and furthermore appears to make a fundamental visual distinction between the 'statement' on the one side and all other types on the other.<sup>2</sup> Segal was right to analyse the accents from the evidence of the manuscripts rather than from the theorising of the grammarians—the latter represents a strong attempt to force the practice into a preconceived theory of Aristotelian logic.

There is a great deal to be said under this head, which it is not needful to repeat here. Further research should take as a starting point the analyses of Hugonnard-Roche 2018 and King 2013, mentioned above (n.33).

#### IV. TEXTS OF THE SYRIAC GRAMMATICAL TRADITION

While the foregoing notes represent some of the more heated discussions that have arisen within the field, all areas of the Syriac grammatical tradition have been subject to a certain amount of work, albeit much of it now in the increasingly distant past. Unsurprisingly, much of this research has focused on unravelling the problems of accentuation or have been connected with studies of individual authors (Jacob of Edessa, Barhebraeus). The following is a list (probably not as exhaustive as was hoped) of known texts relating to Syriac grammar up to the time of Barhebraeus. It is hoped that this may be of use to those wishing to gain an overview of this field and to pursue some part of it in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> E. J. Revell, "Aristotle and the Accents: The Categories of Speech in Jewish and other authors," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974), 19-35

<sup>2</sup> For this basic distinction in Proba, see the table there used (Hoffmann, *Herm.*, 67)

*The West Syrian Tradition*1. The Syriac translation of ps-Dionysius Thrax, *Technē Grammatikē*. **Text I in the present volume (Eng. Tr., ch.2).**

- BL Add.14620, Add. 14658, Berlin Syr. 89 (=Sachau 226). Ed. Merx, *Artis Grammatica*, Appendix, and ch.2.
- Attributed to Joseph Huzaya in some copies.

2. Joseph Huzaya, *On Synonyms* (mentioned by Barhebraeus in his work on the same: Martin, *Œuvres* II,77).3. Thomas the Deacon, *The names of the points*

- Vat Syr. 152, f.191; BL Add. 12178, f.240a-241b (Wright I,110B, nos.1&2); Borgia K.VIII.6, no.5; Mingana Syr. 104, f.46b; Paris Syr. 64, f.212. Ed. Martin, *Ad Georgium*, text III. Also extracts in Phillips, *Letter*, Appendix II, 83 [text]; 83-4 [trans.].
- This text, explicitly attributed to one Thomas the Deacon, is a shorter, and at times more corrupt version of no.4 (below). Mingana Syr. 104 appears to include elements from the next item as well, further establishing their relationship, which needs to be worked out in detail.
- Thomas the Deacon was identified with the well-known Bible translator Thomas of Harkel by Phillips (*Letter*, 90-3) on the firm authority of Barhebraeus, whose testimony about the text matches data in the text itself (unless, of course, Barhebraeus was himself conjecturing the identification for the same reason).

4. School of Thomas the Deacon, *On the Signs of Punctuation*

- BL Add. 12178, f.232a-234b (Wright I,110A); Mingana 104, f.46b ff. (Ca) (see comment above). Ed. Phillips, *Letter*, Appendix I, 68-74 [text]; 74-83 [trans.].
- This text is much fuller and more detailed than the foregoing. A number of passages within it have also been lifted wholesale into the other, underlining the very close connection between them. The evidence adduced by Phillips (*Letter*, 93) to show this relationship (the equation of *ܡܚܘܠܐ* with *ܡܚܘܠܐ*, also mentioned by Barhebraeus, further establishes it) is thus hardly necessary.
- The text is to be dated late sixth or perhaps early seventh century.

- Besides mentioning the traditions about Epiphanius and Aristotle, this text is useful in interpreting Jacob of Edessa's grammar, since the latter does not describe the actual positions of the accents as this does.

5. Anon., *Tract on the Syriac Conjunctions*

- BL Add. 7183, f.126b-127 (Rosen & Forshall, *Catalogue*, 70). BL Add. 12178, f.242a-b; Berlin Syr. 174 (Sachau 70), no.X; Paris Syr. 64, f.213 (prob.); Mingana Syr. 104 (Cc); Vat. Syr. 152, f.192a (following, Gottheil rather than Assemani's catalogue). Ed. R.J.H. Gottheil, "A Tract on the Syriac Conjunctions," *Hebraica* 4 (1888), 167-178, principally on the basis of Berlin Syr. 174.
- The full significance of this text remains to be ascertained. There are important Aristotelian antecedents to the definitions found here which make their way also into the later tradition (Bar Zu'bi, Barhebraeus). The material here is a developed form of John the Stylite's (see Moberg, *Johannes Estonaja*, 29).

6. Ps-Epiphanius, *Names of the Greek Accents*

- Mss as above.
- This text is really a list of just two lines (Gottheil, p.168), which has been prefixed to the *Tract* (no.5).

7. Anon., *The various forms of the points arranged alphabetically*

- BL Add. 12178, f.242b; Paris Syr. 64, f.213, and ?again f.222. Another text in BL Add. 7183, f.132a (Rosen & Forshall, 71a) may be identical.

8. Ramišo'

- Best known for his contribution to the Syrian Masorah (Merx, ch.8). Ramišo's father Sabroy is credited with the invention of the accents by David Bar Paulos (in his letter 14; Rahmani, *Studia syriaca I* [Lebanon, 1904], 44-46). If Bar Paulos is right (Vööbus, *School*, 202, doubts it, but Loopstra, *Add 12138*, vol.II, §4.7, raises it again) then the origin of the Masorah lies with a westerner from Mar Mattai who must have influenced the eastern tradition heavily (perhaps through the school of Nisibis). For further biographical data on Ramišo' and



- Also Merx ed. based on copy apud Jacob bar Šakko.
- ‘Persons’ in the title does not refer to what the term means in current grammatical jargon, but perhaps refers to different vowel shapes placed onto the consonantal skeleton. See Farina, “La linguistique syriaque selon Jacques d’Édesse,” 184; or to ‘homographs,’ see Balzaretti, “Ancient Treatises on Syriac Homonyms.”

12. Western ‘Masoretic’ material.

- The following are the principal manuscripts containing traditions of the West Syrian Masorah: BL Add. 7183; BL Add. 12178; Borgia K.VIII.6; Vat. Syr. 152; Paris Syr. 64; Mingana Syr. 104; St Mark’s, Jerusalem, 1-5. Some also in Berlin Syr. 174 (Sachau 70).

*The East Syrian Tradition*

This is wholly represented by BL Add. 12138 (date: 899), a ms used extensively by Merx (a facsimile is now published).<sup>1</sup> For our purposes, it includes the following noteworthy pieces:

13. The Joseph Huzaya notice

- BL Add 12138, f.312a. Translation and text-critical discussion in Segal, *Diacritical Points*, 66. The end of the codex is filled with notes by the scribe, some on grammatical issues. This is one of a group entitled ‘traditions of the masters of the schools.’ It tells how Joseph Huzaya (sixth century, see item 1 above) invented the accents for the purpose of Bible translation; the text connects this with the work of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ibas of Edessa.

14. A series of four short grammatical tracts on the use of certain morphemes

- Add. 12138, f.308a-309b.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Loopstra, ed., *An East Syrian Manuscript of the “Syriac Masora” Dated to 899 CE. A Facsimile Reproduction of British Library, Add. MS 12138*. 2 vols. Gorgias Press, 2014.

*Other pre-ʿAbbāsīd writers*

## 15. Aḥudemmeḥ

- Late sixth century. Work not extant, but cited by Bar Zuʿbi (see Merx, 33). Probably not to be identified with the well-known metropolitan and martyr of the same name (J.M. Fiey, “Aḥoudemmeḥ,” *Le Muséon* 81 [1968], 155-159), nor with the author of *Man as Microcosm*.

16. ʿEnanišoʿ, *Glossary*

- Late seventh century. Ed. Hoffmann, *Opuscula Nestoriana*, 2-49. There are now other mss of the combined ʿEnanišoʿ/Ḥunain text (e.g. NDS 290 = Scher 139). See Merx ch.7, and further references there.
- There are mss in Berlin (Berlin Syr. 69, no.XV) and New York (Union Seminary) containing a longer version of the treatise edited in Hoffmann’s *Opuscula*. See Gottheil, *Elias*, 61\*-67\* (appendix); and id., “A Syriac Lexicographical Tract,” *Hebraica* 5 (1889), 215-29.

17. Athanasius of Balad, *Introduction to Logic*

- The section on *De Interpretatione* includes some grammatical definitions.
- Ed. G. Furlani, “Contributi alla storia della filosofia greca in Oriente, Testi siriaci, VI, Una introduzione alla logica aristotelica di Atanasio di Balad,” *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, serie quinta, vol.25 (1916), 717-778. English translation forthcoming, Daniel King.

*ʿAbbāsīd Period onwards (Easterners)*18. John Bar Penkaye (late seventh century), *On the particles*

- BO III,I,189. See Merx, 136.

19. Timothy I (Catholicos 780-823), *Letter 19*

- Ed. O. Braun, *Timothei patriarchae I: Epistulae I* (CSCO 74, Louvain, 1914), 126-30, trans., 84-6.
- For discussion, V. Berti, *Vita e Studi di Timoteo I Patriarca Cristiano di Baghdad* (Paris, 2009), 309-21, and King, “Elements of the Syriac Grammatical Tradition.”

20. Išo' Bar Nūn (Catholicos 824-8), *On Synonyms*

- Mosul 109, no.1; NDS 138; Seert 108, no.5.
- Mentioned by Barhebraeus in his own work on the same subject (Martin, *Œuvres* II,77); also Mingana, *Catalogue*, 938. Obviously of the same type as 'Enanišo's treatise (no.17 above).
- Also note the *Grammar* written by the same, of which extracts are extant in Cambridge Add. 2812, f.25.

21. Išo'denaḥ

- Cited by Bar Zu'bi (though with some uncertainty; see Merx, 34). See J.-M. Fiey, "Icho'dnah, Métropolitte de Basra et son œuvre," *Orient Syrien* 11 (1966), 431-50.

22. Ḥunain ibn Ishaq, *On Points*

- Quoted in Elias of Nisibis (no. 24 below). Also mentioned by Barhebraeus; *ZDMG* 32 (1878), 741.
- It should be noted that Ḥunain also composed an enlargement of 'Enanišo's treatise (no.17 above). Ed. Hoffmann, *Opuscula Nestoriana*, 2-49. See Merx ch7, and further references there; and also a work on Arabic syntax which sometimes made comparisons with Syriac. It is quoted by Elias of Nisibis (no. 24 below).

23. Elias of Nisibis (aka Elias bar Šinaya, d.c.1050), *Grammar*

- Ed. & tr. Gottheil, *Elias*. Discussion in Merx ch8, and further references there.

24. Elias of Nisibis, Sixth Dialogue of his *Book of Sessions* (Arabic)

- Ed. K. Samir, "Deux cultures qui s'affrontent: une controverse sur l'ī'rāb au XI siècle entre Élie de Nisibe et le vizier Abū al-Qāsim," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 49 (1975/6), 619-49.
- Discussion with translated extracts in D. Bertaina, "Science, syntax, and superiority in eleventh-century Christian-Muslim discussion: Elias of Nisibis on the Arabic and Syriac languages," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22 (2011), 197-207.
- Of this well-known series of debates between Elias and the vizier Abū al-Qāsim, the sixth concerns the relative merits of Syriac and

Arabic grammar and thus tells us something of the state of the former in Elias's day.

- Elias also composed a thematic glossary, which was the foundation of Tommaso Obicino's *Thesaurus Arabico-syro-latinus*. See Weninger, "Das Übersetzungsbuch," and McCollum, "Prolegomena."

25. Elias of ʿTirhan, *Grammar*,

- Ed. Baethgen, *Elias*. Discussion in Merx ch9.
- See also the anonymous treatises on accents below.

26. Joseph bar Malkon (later known as Iṣō'yabh bar Malkon; 12<sup>th</sup> cent.), *Net of Points*

- For mss see GSL, 309 n13, to which now add Mingana Syr. 94, 244a-255a. Unedited. Selections are quoted in Merx, ch.8.
- A metrical grammar based partly on Elias of Nisibis.

27. Joseph bar Malkon, *Prose Grammar*

- BO III,I,295, under the name Iṣō'yabh Bar Malkon. The text was discovered by Scher in three Mosul mss and Iṣō'yabh was identified with Joseph bar Malkon by Martin, confirmed in GSL, 309 (see n11 for mss). Merx 111-12.
- Text in Arabic, with Syriac used for examples and sometimes for expressing rules that are commented upon in Arabic.
- At least two mss of this text are available online: BnF Syr. 370, and BML Or.419.

28. Four anonymous treatises on accents

- Berlin Syr. 88 (Petermann 9), nos.7,8,9,36 (Sachau, *Verzeichniss*, 323,333b)
- Edited in Merx, 194-197; 197-200; 189-194; 183-189 respectively.
- One of these may be by Elias of ʿTirhan (attributed by Merx, 179-82).
- Like the Western masoretic mss, Petermann 9 also has lexicographical lists (explanations of Greek words etc., this from a later Nestorian source, though the purpose is clearly the same).

29. John Bar Kamis (12<sup>th</sup> cent.)

- BO III,I,296. See Merx, 136.

30. John Bar Zu'bi (fl. c.1210), *Grammar*

- Partial eds. by J.P.P. Martin, *Traité sur accentuation chez les Syriens orientaux par Jean bar Zu'bi (Syriac Text)* (Paris, 1877), and G. Bohas, *Les bgdkpt en syriaque* (Toulouse, 2005).
- For mss, GSL 310n12. To which add now Mingana Syr. 94, 29a-212a and Cambridge Or.1303 (Jenks Collection).
- Extensive discussion, Merx ch10. Merx calls him “the greatest of the East Syrian grammarians.” Despite the many oddities of his grammatical work, Bar Zu'bi remains the most important witness to the earlier traditions among the East Syrians in matters of accentuation etc.
- See especially the various works by George Bohas on Bar Zu'bi, together with the pair of articles by Farina (details in the bibliography below).

31. John Bar Zu'bi, *Metrical Grammar*

- Numerous mss (GSL 311n5). Unedited. Short extracts are offered by Merx, 158,161.

32. John Bar Zu'bi, Various other grammatical tracts

- GSL 311n6,7,8,9.
- A good idea of the variety of Bar Zu'bi's as yet unedited works may be gauged from a perusal of the catalogue entries for BL Add. 25876 (Wright, *Cat.*, III,1175ff.) and Cambridge Add. 2013.

*'Abbāsīd Period onwards (Westerners)*

33. John the Stylite (eighth or ninth century?), *Grammar*

- This text was known to Merx via the note in Bar Zu'bi, but was later discovered by Addai Scher in a manuscript at Notre Dame des Semences. It was described in some detail by Moberg, *Johannes Estonaja*. The text remains unedited.
- There is some confusion over the identification of the ms. Vosté includes it under his ms no.293, which is not in Scher's older

catalogue. The latter's no.139, which Moberg cites as his source, is possibly equivalent to Vosté's 290. It seems that Scher has amalgamated the contents of at least two separate mss into his no.139.

- Date could be mid-ninth cent (Assemani, Moberg), early eighth by identifying the author with a correspondent of Jacob of Edessa (Schröter, Baumstark), or earlier than Jacob (Merx, arguing on evolutionary grounds, but he only had Bar Zu'bi's comment to go on).
- Moberg also uses this grammar to reconstruct some elements of the teaching of Jacob of Edessa.

34. David Bar Paulos (late eighth cent.), *Letter on the origins of pointing*

- I. Rahmani, *Studia Syriaca* I, ܡܘܨܪܝܐ (Latin tr., 44-6).
- This letter is significant in particular for the light it sheds on Ramišo' and the origins of accentuation (s.v. above).

*A Note on David Bar Paulos*

The information on this figure found in Baumstark (*GSL*, 272-3) is based upon the discussion in Rahmani, *Studia Syriaca* I, 43-6, 67-9. Rahmani's texts are only excerpts, however, from a ms containing a collection of David's letters. There are also fragments of information about David in Bar Šalibi and Barhebraeus, picked up already in *BO*. The *letter on the origins of pointing* is unfortunately missing its middle section in the Šarfeh ms used by Rahmani. It is also extant, however, in the similar collection of more than sixty of David's letters in a ms at Deir Za'faran. This ms was numbered Mardin Orth. 158 by Vööbus ("Entdeckung des Briefkorpus des Dawid bar Paulos," *Oriens Christianus* 58 [1974], 45-80), but Deir Za'faran 248 by Ignatius Barsoum (*Scattered Pearls*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. trans. M. Moosa [Gorgias Press, 2003], 373). The latter gives an extended description of the contents of some of these letters. His biographical information (p.372) seems to derive wholly from this letter (no.13 in Vööbus's listing). Mingana Syr.29 is a modern copy of the Deir Za'faran codex (our letter at f.19a-21a).

The letter appears to imply that David is himself a descendent of Sabroy (both are "of Beth Rabban"), although "to the fifth generation" not as a

grandson (as Barsoum).<sup>1</sup> The letters provide other fragments of biographical information, such as that David studied Greek at the monastery of Khanushia in Sinjar (one of his letters attributes all wisdom to the Greeks). He was also a poet and liturgist of some renown. Although everyone now seems to agree on dating David to the middle or end of the eighth century, there is a dislocated (possibly inauthentic) sentence attributed to him which quotes the ninth-century Ḥunain (Gottheil, “Dawidh bar Paulos,” cxviii).

35. David Bar Paulos, *On the Definition of Speech*

- Mss: India Office 9; Mosul 109, no.3; Mosul 111, no.4; Seert 108, no.4. Possibly also Mingana 420, H. Ed: R. J. H. Gottheil, “Dawidh bar Paulos, a Syriac Grammarian,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15 (1893): cxii-cxiii.
- A French translation by Margherita Farina is forthcoming.
- This piece, together with those on the alphabet and the noun (next two items) are found together in India Office 9, and probably Mosul 109 and Mingana 420 (the headings in the latter suggest that it is the same three texts in question there), together forming a sort of ‘grammar’.

36. David Bar Paulos, *On the division of nouns*

- Mss: India Office 9; Petermann 9, no.7 (=Berlin Syr 88); Mosul 111, no.5; Seert 108, no.4; Mingana 420, 63b. Ed: Gottheil, cxiii,10-cxv,4, Sachau, *Verzeichniss*, 330; Hoffmann, *Herm*, 129-30.
- A French translation by Margherita Farina is forthcoming

37. David Bar Paulos, *On the Letters of the alphabet*

- Ms: India Office 9; Seert 108, no.4. Possibly also Mingana, H. Ed: Gottheil, *op.cit.*, cxv,5-cxviii,6.
- A French translation by Margherita Farina is forthcoming
- The text describes the purported origins of the alphabet and some of its mysteries. David also wrote various poems dealing with the

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the letters of David were published in I. Armalet, *Lettres de Josué, fils de David, surnommé Bar-Kilo, de Sévère Jacques de Bartelli, surnommé Bar-Chacaco, et de David de Beit-Rabban* (1929); and Dolapönü, *Egratheh d-Dawid bar Paulos* (Mardin, 1953) – non vidi.

mysteries of the alphabet as well as numerous acrostic poems, about which he had some typical, if to us rather strange, ideas (*GSL*, 273 n2)

38. David Bar Paulos, *On the changeable letters* (i.e. bgdkpt)
- Mingana 475, f.164b-166a; Paris Syr. 276, no.14e; St Mark's, Jerusalem 2-12.
  - A French translation by Margherita Farina is forthcoming
39. David Bar Paulos, *On Pointing*
- (Known only from a Damascus ms mentioned by Baumstark, *GSL*, 272, n.10). This is significant in light of the contents of the letter.
40. David Bar Paulos, Other fragments
- Lexicographical comments are sometimes picked up by Bar 'Alī (*Thesaurus*, 464 etc.)
41. 'Ebdochus, *On Synonyms* (probably 12<sup>th</sup> cent.)
- For the various recensions of 'Ebdochus's glossary, see *GSL*, 294-5, to which add Mingana 475 (St Mark's, Jerusalem 30\* = 2-12 Macomber Catalogue), Deir el-Zafaran 192, and plenty of other copies in eastern collections.
  - Mentioned by Barhebraeus (Martin, *Œuvres* II,77). Date unknown. See chapter 4, endnote xxviii below.
42. Jacob Bar Šakko (d.1241), *Dialogues*. **Text III in the present volume.**
- Only one part of one dialogue dealt with grammar. Ed. Merx, Appendix. Extensive discussion, Merx ch 11.
  - Before Barhebraeus, the most important exponent of the Western traditions (although Bar Zu'bi was among his teachers).
43. Jacob Bar Šakko, *Harmonia* (Metrical Grammar). **Text IV in the present volume.**
- Partial ed. Merx, Appendix. Since then see also Mingana Syr. 501, f.61b-79b.

44. Barhebraeus (1226-86), *Book of Splendours (Buch der Strahlen)* (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܩܝܨܬܐ)
- Ed. Martin, *Œuvres I*; and Moberg, *Livre des Splendeurs*. For full ms listings see Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Biobibliography* (Gorgias Press, 2005), 375-84.
  - German trans. Moberg, *Buch der Strahlen*; English trans. of extracts (with Syriac text) in Phillips, *Letter*, and Martin, *Ad Georgium*. Other bibliography by Farina (see listings below).
  - This is the principal grammatical output of Barhebraeus and is the most important and extensive of all ancient Syriac grammars, especially for the reconstruction of the work of Jacob of Edessa.
45. Barhebraeus, *Metrical Grammar* (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܩܝܨܬܐ)
- Ed. E. Bertheau, *Gregorii bar Hebraei, Grammatica linguae Syriacae in metro Ephraemeo* (Göttingen, 1843)—reprint, *The Metrical Grammar of Gregory Bar Hebraeus* (Gorgias Press, 2009); Martin, *Œuvres II*, 1-76. Mss in Takahashi, 359-72.
46. Barhebraeus, *De Aequilitteris* (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܩܝܨܬܐ)
- Ed. Martin, *Œuvres II*, 77-127. Mss in Takahashi, 359-73.
  - See also Balzaretto, *Homonymns*.

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## VI. SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIA ARTIS GRAMMATICAE

To enable the reader the more readily to navigate their way around Merx's work, what follows offers brief summaries to each chapter, outlining the arguments presented and the most important points that arise.

### *Chapter 1 Prolegomena*

Merx here stresses the importance of grammar for the preservation and teaching of the higher arts of classical antiquity. It was the continuation of grammatical studies in the West that paved the way for the mediaeval return to philosophy. The Syriac pattern was different and was focused rather on their own language and on the scriptures. The Syriac method of studying grammar was motivated by their particular school curriculum.

Because grammars were written initially to teach pronunciation (scriptural recitation), the theory of pointing and accentuation was particularly significant. Apart from this, however, the Syrians tended to construct their grammars on the basis of Greek models, though there was change over time in how these different approaches were reconciled. The writing of Syriac grammars was closely associated with the translation of Greek philosophy and the collection of philosophical glossaries. Foremost among early Syriac philosophers was Sergius of Reš'aina, but he was probably not the author of the first Syriac grammatical treatise, which was a translation of (ps) Dionysius Thrax's *Technē Grammatikē*. This text is introduced in its manuscript transmission and the possibility that Joseph Huzaya was the translator is raised, but rejected.

### *Chapter 2 Translation of an ancient Syriac Grammar (Dionysius Thrax)*

This chapter consists of a translation of the Syriac version of the *Technē Grammatikē*, together with notes on the similarities and dissimilarities as compared to the original. Note that whereas the Syriac text in the appendix contains all the variants from mss B and C, the translation in this chapter is based on ms A, even where, as often towards the end, C fills up the gaps and corruptions in A. We have provided a translation based directly on the Syriac, only occasionally giving the Greek original as Merx does.

### *Chapter 3 Orthoepy, or Accurate Recitation*

Joseph Huzaya may not have been the translator of Dionysius Thrax, but to him is correctly attributed a change in the system of 'reading'. This latter term is defined as the positioning of points to distinguish parts of speech. The 'Maqreyane' were those Masoretic masters from the School of Nisibis who systematised the reading of the scriptures using Greek grammatical theory as their model. This process began in the sixth century and took its lead from the work of translators of Greek philosophy and theology. The East Syrian Masoretic codex (BL Add. 12138) provides a great deal of evidence for the teachings of the Maqreyane. The development of grammar was based not just on the 'reading' of scripture, but equally on the Greek Church Fathers. Aḥūdemmēh and his (non-extant) schematisation of the verbal system is briefly mentioned.

### *Chapter 4 The Life and Work of Jacob of Edessa*

The biography of Jacob is introduced, also his knowledge of Hebrew. His concern for church hymnography is first raised and demonstrates his philological accuracy in transposing the Greek metrical system into Syriac. The autograph manuscript of Jacob's translation of Severus's *Hymns* is discussed. His education of the clergy led him to a concern for grammar, beginning with his scholia on the Biblical text; then his work on chronology; his enforcement of the canons in his church; his teaching of Greek and the scriptures after his abdication of the episcopacy. His philological comments on the Hebrew text are briefly introduced, as is his recensional work, which leads on to the discussion of his *Letter on Orthography*. The rules laid down in this letter are summarised and his *Grammar* itself introduced.

### *Chapter 5 The Syriac Grammar of Jacob of Edessa*

This chapter gleans as much as possible from the remaining fragments of Jacob's *Grammar*. Merx begins by pointing out that it is essentially a translation of the Greek grammatical tradition. Jacob follows the Greek ordering of each subject and he is ever comparing the Greek and Syriac languages. He begins with orthography and Jacob's vowel symbols—the later system of dotted vowels cannot have been fully developed already in

his day. Jacob had nine vowels in his system. Merx reconstructs as far as possible this part of the Grammar.

After vowels, he dealt with consonants, categorising them according to the Greek sequences. He explains, using this system, the changes in consonants that occur in Syriac. He even tried to explain *bgdkpt* by means of Greek phonological classes. He shows how Bar Šakko and Barhebraeus are both dependent on Jacob for this subject.

Next comes the syllable, a subject not taken up by later grammarians. Jacob must have included it because his system of noun classification depends upon first classifying different kinds of syllables.

In classifying the noun, he seems to have used Dionysius's five attributes of the noun. Jacob lists these noun types by form, using a system derived from Theodosius's Canons. Merx proves Jacob's close borrowing from Theodosius by a number of comparisons.

Finally, there is evidence that Jacob must have treated the verb next, although this is not extant. However, the numerous parallels between Jacob and Barhebraeus show that the latter can be used to reconstruct the outline of Jacob's *Grammar* where this is not extant.

#### *Chapter 6 Jacob's improvements to the Syriac accents and the Relationships between Greek, Syriac, and Hebrew punctuation*

The Grammar has been dealt with, but the enormously important subject of pointing/accenuation has not yet been touched upon. Accenuation was dealt with by Jacob at the end of his grammar (following Dionysius) and the later giants (Bar Šakko and Barhebraeus) followed Jacob.

Merx's principal argument is that the Syriac system is based upon the Greek theorising about the use of points for providing a logical division of sentences. The Syriac adoption of this Greek approach may be seen in the earliest Syriac mss, which display a very simple system of internal sentence division. The fifth century masters developed this into the system better known today (i.e. with four logical accents: šewāyā, taḥtāyā, 'alāyā, pasōqā). Joseph Huzaya was responsible for adding to this six further 'rhetorical' accents. These latter developments were 'native' rather than Greek-inspired.

The Hebrew accenuation system, by contrast, was logical only. Its major sentence dividers were derived from the Syriac system of disjunctive logical accents as known to Joseph Huzaya, as can easily be seen by their

positions and usage. They even took from Syriac its single conjunctive accent (*garōrā*), which the Syrians in turn had taken from Greek. This Syriac-Hebrew borrowing took place between the middle of the sixth and the middle of the seventh century in three stages (greater accents—vowels—lesser accents).

Jacob of Edessa made significant additions to Joseph Huzaya's system, particularly in adding many new rhetorical accents by combining previously existing ones. His system for the rhetorical accents divided them into mimetic and temporal categories (even this distinction is derived from Dionysius Thrax). These rhetorical accents are then set out and described; it is suggested that the precise definitions of the temporal rhetorical accents was derived by Jacob from the Greek system of Nicanor. The process by which this is supposed to have happened is laid out in detail.

The basis for all this is a reconstructed 'list' of Jacob's accents which makes use of his letter on orthography together with the borrowings in Bar Šakko and Barhebraeus. This reconstructed text is provided after the above discussions.

The chapter closes with a notice of Thomas the Deacon's accent system, which appears to be half-way between those of Joseph Huzaya and Jacob of Edessa. It too draws independently on Greek traditions.

#### *Chapter 7 The East Syrian Grammarians 'Enanišo' and Ḥunain*

After Jacob's time, the Syrians stopped writing grammars but did start writing lexica. The first of these is 'Enanišo'. The nature and identity of his extant work is discussed. The outline of the work and some of its characteristics are described, including unusual terminology. Išo' Bar Nun also wrote in this genre but his work is lost. Ḥunain ibn Iṣḥāq was well known for his grammars but all that remains is his recension of 'Enanišo's list of homonyms. Its terminology is discussed. John the Stylite is also mentioned. Syriac grammar became, in Jacob of Edessa and afterwards, a synthesis of the masoretic traditions (pointing and vowels) and the translated Greek grammar (morphology).



therefore no need to hypothesise that Greek grammar (rather than logic) had any influence on Arabic grammar.

The subject of the influence of logical principles on Arabic grammar is dealt with at some length and has been the subject of controversy since (see Introduction). The Arabic preference for logical explanations rather than strictly grammatical ones led to shortcomings in Arabic morphological and syntactical theory. Following Ibn Chaldun, the Arabs are criticised for this faulty approach. They are praised, however, for not having slavishly copied Greek models but for having successfully developed a grammar well-suited to the Semitic language group.

This account throws a better light, according to Merx, on those Syrian grammarians who chose to base their work on Arabic rather than Greek sources. The Catholicos Elias I of ʿIṣṣa was the first of these. He wanted to modernise Syriac grammar by analysing it according to the Arabic system, but as a pioneer he made many mistakes and was unable to achieve his objective. A number of the confused passages from Elias's grammar are briefly discussed in relation to Arabic grammar, as well as those aspects of it that derive from traditional Syriac models and from logic.

#### *Chapter 10 John Bar Zu'bi*

Dubbed the greatest of the East Syrian grammarians, Bar Zu'bi was more indebted to philosophy than to Arabic grammar. His indebtedness to the Syriac Aristotelian tradition is demonstrated. The first half of his grammar follows the outline of Dionysius Thrax and owes much of its detail to the Greek tradition as well. His categorisations of the noun are based on logical rather than grammatical considerations. His analysis of the accents is again dependent on logic but is also in part derived from Elias of ʿIṣṣa. His classification of the verbal system comes from Joseph Bar Malkon and may go back to Jacob of Edessa, whose work lies behind much in Bar Zu'bi.

The second half of the grammar is more 'native', dealing with accentuation, aspiration etc. after the manner of his Syriac predecessors.

#### *Appendix I Three Treatises on East Syrian Accentuation*

Merx here summarizes all that has been said about the Eastern accentual system, elucidating in particular what we know about it from the famous masoretic codex Add 12138. He then presents three texts illustrating





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