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Rhetoric and other language sciences in Syriac¹

Margherita Farina – Mara Nicosia

1. The pedagogical and epistemological role of language sciences

Rhetoric and grammar constituted the basics of the Syriac *cursus studiorum* (course of study). For centuries, throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, education in language sciences in Syriac ecclesiastical culture was considered one of the primary instruments to access the Scriptures and, ultimately, Christian theology. Moreover, within a more general cultural perspective, grammar, rhetoric and dialectic constituted a progressive pathway to knowledge. Language sciences were meant to provide the student with the analytical method, syllogistic reasoning (Syr. *sulogismā*), governing all other disciplines, from astronomy and geometry, to medicine and physics.

Syriac Christianity first developed in the second century in the city of Edessa (Syr. ' *Urhay*). Between the third and sixth centuries, it spread westwards throughout Syria-Palestine and eastwards through Mesopotamia, Iran, India and Central Asia. Through the translation of the Old and New Testaments, between the second and third centuries, the Aramaic dialect of Edessa became the religious, liturgical and cultural language of eastern Christianity, under the name of Syriac (*lešānā suryāyā*). Refounded as a Macedonian colony in 304 BCE by the *diadochus* Seleucos I Nicator, Edessa was a Hellenistic *polis*, with Greek institutions, and was led by a bilingual Greco-Aramaic cultural élite. Several middle-eastern cities, like Edessa, participated in the Greco-Roman system of education, which was devised for Greek-speaking people, but was progressively adapted into Aramaic, through a process that lasted several centuries and that reached an apex between the fifth and the seventh centuries CE. At the same time, the centres of learning for Christian society in these cities shifted from Greek schools to Christian schools belonging to different communities (such as those of the Persians and of the Armenians, in Edessa in the fourth-fifth centuries). Subsequently monasteries also took a central role in learning, among which one of the most famous was Qenneshre “The eagle’s nest”, on the Euphrates, east of Aleppo.

These different institutions inherited the Hellenistic system of education, organised into three stages: primary, propaedeutic, and advanced.² We can learn about the Syriac school curriculum from the accounts of the organization of the School of Nisibis (founded in the late fifth century CE), a prominent center of learning. The primary teaching focused on basic literacy, on recognizing the letters of the alphabet and on mastering basic reading. In Syriac education, this teaching, as described in a number of literary sources, was provided by the *maqryānā*, “reader” (from the root *qr*’ “to speak out loud”, also “to read”). While being initiated into literacy, pupils also received the foundations of religious education. Hence, they first read the Psalms (which were learnt by heart through chanting), then the Gospel and the Pauline Epistles, and finally the Old Testament. The *maqryānā* also taught basic notions of grammar. A certain level of primary education was imparted by the *mhaggyānā*, “the one who makes spelling”, but also “the one who makes meditating” (from the root *hgy* “to think, meditate”), who was in charge of teaching how to spell words. The method of this basic teaching is described in the sixth-century text *Cause of the foundation of schools*: the simple letters (*'athwatā pšitātā*) are read out loud to the child, who repeats them. Then the letters are connected in order to form nouns, which the child has to spell (*nehgē*) and practice. Due to Syriac consonantal writing, spelling and vocalizing a text implies a

¹ We are grateful to Riccardo Contini, Daniel King, Alberto Rigolio and Alexandra Lukes for their precious notes and suggestions.

² See I. Hadot, *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique* (Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1984), ch. II.

certain degree of proficiency in the language, as well as some non-trivial grammatical and morpho-syntactical notions. For this reason, the term *mhaggyānā* has been interpreted also as designating the teacher of rhetoric (perhaps modelled upon the Greek *meletāō* “to meditate, to study”), while another hypothesis is that the activity of the *mhaggyānā* focused on vocabulary and on the difference between Syriac as a literary language and the dialects spoken by the pupils.³ Two figures were in charge of more advanced teachings: the *badoqā*, “researcher” (from the root *bdq* “to search”, but also “to show”), and the *mpaššqānā*, “interpreter” (from the root *pšq* “to explain, to interpret”). The first was specialised in secular knowledge, covering philosophy, history, geography, astronomy etc. The second, instead, was the exegete, who interpreted and commented on the Scriptures.

The Syriac world followed the subdivision of disciplines and the pedagogical *cursus* of the *enkyklios paideia*, a progressive learning pathway in which grammar, rhetoric (including poetry and metrics) and dialectic were meant to provide the essential analytical instruments to gain access to arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music (the system designated in the West as *trivium* and *quadrivium*).⁴ From this perspective, language sciences constituted a coherent system, sharing a technical vocabulary (a combination of native Aramaic terms, Greek loanwords and learned calques) and the same analytical method, since they all aimed at providing the pupil (as well as the proficient scholar) with the same linguistic key to a cosmos that was conceived as logically ordered/organised.

The Syriac *Book of Dialogues*, by the West-Syriac scholar Severos bar Šakko (d. 1241) testifies to the assimilation of this pedagogical and epistemological model. This encyclopaedic manual takes the form of questions and answers, and is arranged into two books: Book 1 consists of three dialogues on grammar, rhetoric and poetry respectively (in addition to a brief lexicographical appendix); Book 2 consists of two dialogues, one on logic and philosophy and the other on the definitions and subdivisions of philosophy, physics, mathematical sciences and metaphysics. Language sciences (grammar and rhetoric) are clearly considered as propaedeutic to all other disciplines.

A concurrent paradigm in the Syriac organisation of knowledge opposed the ecclesiastical sciences to the “external” or secular ones. Ecclesiastical sciences were the ones directly connected with the reading and interpretation of the Scriptures, theology, canon law etc., while all other disciplines were often designated as *barāyā*, meaning “external”, but also “secular” (Mk 4,11). This subdivision partly mirrors the domains of expertise of the *mpaššqānā* and of the *badoqā*, the “external” sciences being the prerogative of the latter.⁵ As far as language sciences are concerned, rhetoric and dialectic are always considered “external” disciplines, while the status of grammar seems to vary over time. Its position at the very beginning of Bar Šakko’s *Dialogues* clearly places it among the “external” sciences; however, it can also belong to the ecclesiastical sciences, according to a perspective that considers grammar as a primary tool for accessing the biblical texts.

2. The grammatical, logical and rhetorical corpus

2.1. Greco-Syriac translations and original compositions

³ See the account in Barhadbšabba ‘Arbaya, *Cause de la fondation des écoles*, ed. and trans. A. Scher, *Patrologia Orientalis*, T. IV, fasc. 4, n.° 18 (Turnhout, Brepols, 1981), pp. 349, 378-393 and the commentary by Scher on pp. 398-399. See also P. Bettolo, ‘Scuole e ambienti intellettuali nelle chiese di Siria’, in C. D’Ancona (ed.), *Storia della filosofia nell’Islam medievale. I.* (Torino, Einaudi, 2005), pp. 48-10, and R. Contini, ‘The role of linguistics in Syrian society’, in S. Auroux et al. (eds.), *History of the Language Sciences* (Belin, De Gruyter, 2000), pp. 341-344.

⁴ Hadot, *Arts libéraux*, ch. VI (pp. 263-293); J. W. Watt, ‘Grammar, Rhetoric and Enkyklios Paideia in Syriac’, *ZDMG* 143 (1993), 45-71. On the role of rhetoric in propaedeutic education see J. W. Watt, ‘A Portrait of John Bar Aphthonia Founder of the Monastery of Qenneshre’, in J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Watt (eds.), *Portraits of Spiritual Authority* (1999), pp. 155-169.

⁵ V. Berti, *Vita e studi di Timoteo I (m. 823) patriarca cristiano di Baghdad* (Paris, Association pour l’avancement des études iraniennes, 2009), p. 81.

By the end of Late Antiquity, the Aristotelian *Organon* was standardized by the Alexandrian tradition into a corpus comprising the canonical works *Categories*, *Peri hermeneias*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*, together with *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, the whole prefaced by Porphyry's *Eisagoge*. Between the sixth and the seventh century, an intense translation movement achieved the transfer into Syriac of this Greek logical corpus. Particularly, *Categories*, *Peri hermeneias* and *Prior Analytics* were the object of multiple West-Syriac translations (mostly by Proba, Jacob of Edessa, George bishop of the Arabs). In the same period, two translations were also produced of Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, the most notable one by Athanasius of Balad, who was also responsible for the first Syriac translation of *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*. The translation activity was accompanied by the redaction of commentaries, such as those by Sergius of Reš'ayna (d. 536), Proba (sixth century), Paul the Persian (sixth century), Severus Sebokht (d. 666/7) and George Bishop of the Arabs (d. 724), which touched upon the first portion of the logical curriculum, from the *Eisagoge* to *Prior Analytics*.⁶

In the same period, the adaptations of the *Techne grammatike* (sixth century, by Joseph Huzaya)⁷ and of the *Canons* of Theodosius (seventh century, by Jacob of Edessa),⁸ provided Syriac students with the essential grammatical tools for accessing the Greek approach to language analysis. Such early works laid the conceptual and terminological foundations for the development of a rich grammatical tradition that was updated and adapted almost every century both by West and East Syriac authors, perpetuating the Greek model of metalinguistic analysis.⁹

With the development of Arabic linguistics, starting from the late eighth century, Syriac scholars living under Islamic rule were confronted with another paradigm of language analysis. During the early 'Abbasid rule (ninth-tenth century) several Syro-Arabic lexicographical works were produced, following a movement of translation of Greek philosophical and scientific texts from Greek into Arabic, often via a Syriac intermediary. In the eleventh century the first Syriac grammar largely based upon an Arabic metalinguistic model was produced by the East-Syriac patriarch Elias of Tīrhan (Elias I, d. 1049). During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries some Syriac grammarians rejected all Arabic influence (Yoḥannan bar Zo'bi), while others attempted to integrate elements of Arabic linguistics within a traditional framework ultimately deriving from the *Techne* (Išo'yahb bar Malkon, late twelfth-early thirteenth century; Barhebraeus, d. 1286). Among the main differences opposing the Greek-based Syriac grammars to the Arabic-based ones are: the number of the parts of speech (seven vs. three), the use of a metalanguage calqued upon Greek or Arabic terminology, and the prominence given in Arabic-based Syriac grammars to the morpho-syntactic issue of the distinction of agent and patient in the sentence.

Contrary to what we have seen for logic and grammar, no direct evidence has survived of early Syriac translations of the Greek rhetorical corpus. This fact could also be explained by the diffuse Greek-Syriac bilingualism of the early Syriac educational system, where translations were mainly meant for beginning students, whereas advanced content was probably studied in the Greek originals.

⁶ H. Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque* (Paris, Vrin, 2004), pp. 11-16 ; 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* (Paris, Geuthner, 2018), pp. 55-93.

⁷ Ed. in A. Merx, *Historia artis grammaticae apud Syros*, (Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus, 1889); see also R. Contini, 'Considerazioni interlinguistiche sull'adattamento siriano della *Techné Grammatiké* di Dionisio Trace', in R. B. Finazzi and A. Valvo (eds.), *La diffusione dell'eredità classica nell'età tardoantica e medievale - Il Romanzo di Alessandro e altri scritti* (Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 1998), pp. 95-111.

⁸ *Fragments of the Turras mamlla nahraya or Syriac Grammar of Jacob of Edessa*, ed. W. Wright (London, Gilbert and Rivington, 1871), repr. with transl. in Appendix to A. Merx, *A History of Grammatical Studies among the Syrians* trans. D. King (Piscataway NJ, Gorgias Press); R. Talmon, 'Jacob of Edessa the Grammarian', in B. Ter Haar Romeny (ed.), *Jacob of Edessa and the Culture of his Day* (Leiden, Brill, 2008), pp. 159-187; M. Farina, 'La théorie linguistique de Jacques d'Édesse', in M. Farina (ed.), *Les auteurs syriaques et leur langue* (Paris, Geuthner, 2018), pp. 167-187.

⁹ For a history of the Syriac grammatical tradition see A. Merx, *Historia*.

In the domain of sophistic rhetoric (concerning mainly the styles and structure of literary composition),¹⁰ the earliest extant treatise is the *Rhetoric* by the West-Syriac Antony of Tagrit (ninth century?),¹¹ in five books, only partially edited,¹² followed by the second and the third of Bar Šakko's *Dialogues*.¹³ Antony's work appears to be a sort of school handbook. Book One, which is divided into thirty chapters and represents an introduction to philosophical rhetoric in its most technical aspects, provides a definition of rhetoric and of its components (1-3), and addresses praise and blame, persuasion and dissuasion, accusation and defence, representing the types of rhetorical discourses.¹⁴ The book discusses the composition of these discourses, the correct order to follow and their technical vocabulary (4-15).¹⁵ Moreover, it deals with a series of rhetorical devices (16-21), types of prologues and epilogues (21), various utilities (22-24), the use of poetry, grammar and comedy in rhetoric (25-27), the sequence within a speech (28),¹⁶ types of weaknesses in discourses (29), and it ends with an epilogue (30).¹⁷ Book Two discusses the benefits of praise; Book Three deals with subject matter, disposition and ornamentation, while Book Four concerns the praises of friendship; Book Five addresses poetry, namely metres, figures of speech and assonant letters.

Bar Šakko's *Dialogues* on rhetoric and poetry are largely based on the first and fifth books of Antony of Tagrit's *Rhetoric*, respectively.¹⁸ The *Dialogue on Rhetoric* contains twenty-eight questions and answers, beginning with a definition of rhetoric (1) and the different species of rhetoric (2), a description of each species and of its internal articulation, e.g., panegyric, invective, exhortation etc. (3-8). The subsequent questions consider the techniques through which the art of rhetoric can be acquired (9, 11), further subdivisions of the different species (10, 12), and the sources from which exempla should be derived (14). Questions 16 to 26 address specific topics: the different sorts of prologues and epilogues (16), the advantages of following the different species of rhetoric (17), and the correlation between rhetoric and ecclesiastical law (18).¹⁹ Questions 19-26 address occasional speech delivery: ecclesiastical feasts, consolations, epistles, narrative texts, and answers to questions. Questions 27-28 examine the necessary skills and the potential obstacles to mastering the art of rhetoric.

The subsequent *Dialogue on Poetry*²⁰ opens with a definition of poetry itself, with its four principal species: metres, assonant letters, narrative/plot and figures of speech (1-2). It addresses the elements composing the verse, its species (3-4), the species composing each type of syllabic metrical pattern (5), various types of verses (6-8), the laws governing assonant letters (9-10), and

¹⁰ Watt distinguishes between a sophistic and a logic branch of Greek rhetorical theory: J.W. Watt, 'Literary and Philosophical Rhetoric in Syriac', in J. W. Watt (ed.), *The Aristotelian Tradition in Syriac* (London, Routledge, 2019), pp. 217-230.

¹¹ This date is debated. See M. Nicosia, 'Reassessing Antony of Tagrit: When Did he Actually Live?', *Oriens Christianus* 104 (forthcoming).

¹² *The Fifth Book of the Rhetoric of Antony of Tagrit*, ed. and trans. J. W. Watt (Leuven, Peeters, 1986); P. E. Eskenasy, *Antony of Tagrit's Rhetoric Book One: Introduction, Partial Translation, and Commentary* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

¹³ A brief outline of the contents in Bendrat, 'Der Dialog über die Rhetorik des Jakob Bar Shakko', in P. A. de Lagarde and H. Dörries (eds.), *Paul de Lagarde und die syrische Kirchengeschichte* (Göttingen, Göttinger Arbeitskreis für syrische Kirchengeschichte, 1968), pp. 19-26.

¹⁴ Epideictic, deliberative and judicial rhetoric, respectively. See J.W. Watt, 'Syriac Rhetorical Theory and the Syriac Tradition of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*', in W. W. Fortenbaugh and D. C. Mirhady (eds.), *Peripatetic Rhetoric After Aristotle* (New Brunswick (NJ), Transaction Publishers, 1994), pp. 243-260.

¹⁵ The examples featured throughout chapters 8-15 testify to the didactic aim of the treatise.

¹⁶ Edition and translation in J. W. Watt, 'Syriac Panegyric in Theory and Practice', *Le Muséon* 102 (1989), 271-298.

¹⁷ Complete chart in Eskenasy, *Antony*, p. XVI.

¹⁸ List of correspondences in Bendrat, *Der Dialog*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁹ This topic appears to be Bar Šakko's innovation.

²⁰ Severos bar Šakko, *De la Métrique. Traité troisième du livre premier des Dialogues*, in *De la métrique chez les syriens*, ed. and trans. J.-P. P. Martin (Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus, 1879), pp. 8-67 for qq. 1-11, and M. Sprengling, 'Severos Bar Shakko's *Poetics*, Part II', *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 32/4 (1916), 293-308 for qq. 12-21.

style suggestions (11). It discusses figures of speech, namely fable, aphorism, bare figure, prosopopoeia, metaphor/comparison (12-17), then narrative/plot (18), comedy (19) and tragedy (20), together with their species.

In the domain of philosophical rhetoric (concerning the different parts, classes and modes of discourse in connection with logic and dialectic), no extant manuscript hosts a Syriac translation Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which led many to question its very existence.²¹ However, the author of the extant Arabic translation of the *Rhetoric*²² declares that he used a Syriac version in the redaction of his version; this is apparent in his choice of Arabic technical words, which strongly points to the mediation of a Syriac translation.²³

A section of Barhebraeus' *Cream of Wisdom* (1285-1286) contains the only extant commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in Syriac.²⁴ In seven chapters, the commentary considers 1. Usefulness of rhetoric and logical foundations of the discipline. 2. Deliberative rhetoric. 3. Epideictic rhetoric. 4. Judicial rhetoric. 5. Habits and passions of the soul 6. Common forms of the three species of rhetoric. 7. Rhetorical terminology and its organisation. The work is based on Ibn Sīnā's Arabic commentary hosted in the *Kitāb al-Šifā'*,²⁵ and therefore it represents a synthesis of the Syriac and Arabic rhetorical traditions. Barhebraeus' commentary features a vocabulary which is clearly rooted in the Syriac tradition, and the lost Syriac version of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* seems to have been among its sources.

The two branches of Syriac rhetorical tradition, one represented by Antony of Tagrit and Bar Šakko and the other by Barhebraeus, feature an imposing number of Greek loanwords, and occasional Latin ones – mediated through Greek – which were integrated and adapted, and they often display new orthographies of previously known words.²⁶

2.2. The manuscript tradition

The manuscript tradition, especially East Syriac, displays a certain correlation between grammatical and logical texts.²⁷ The foundations of logic (Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, the first part of the *Organon*) are often accompanied by grammatical compendia. This is the case, for instance, with the manuscript Petermann 9 of Berlin Staatsbibliothek (1260),²⁸ which adds Syriac and Arabic translations and commentaries to texts such as *Eisagoge*, *Peri hermeneias*, *Categories* and *Prior Analytics* with various orthoepic texts (those focused on correct reading and reciting) and two different Syriac grammars, by Elias of Țirhan (based on the Arabic model) and by Bar Zo'bi (based on the Greek model). The correlation is even stronger in first section of the manuscript, which displays a double-column layout, where Bar Zo'bi's grammar and the *Eisagoge* are presented next to each other.

²¹ Above of all U. Vagelpohl, *Aristotle's Rhetoric in the East: The Syriac and Arabic Translation and Commentary Tradition* (Leiden, Brill, 2008), pp. 56-61.

²² Ibn al-Samḥ, *Aristotle's Ars Rhetorica: the Arabic Version. A New Edition with Commentary and Glossary*, ed. M. C. Lyons (Cambridge, Pembroke, 1982).

²³ M. Nicosia, 'From Antony of Tagrit to the Arabic Version: the Syriac Technical Vocabulary of Rhetoric and the Migration of Words', *Hugoye* 23.1 (2020), 61-97; M. Nicosia, 'Tradition and Technical Vocabulary of Syriac Rhetoric between the Greek World and the Arabic Reinterpretation', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Naples 'L'Orientale' (2020).

²⁴ *Aristotelian Rhetoric in Syriac. Barhebraeus, Butyrum Sapientiae, Book of Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. J. W. Watt (Leiden, Brill, 1999).

²⁵ *Al-šifā', al-mantiq VIII – al-ḥaṭāba (La logique VIII – La Rhétorique)*, ed. M. S. Salem (Cairo, Imprimerie Nationale, 1954).

²⁶ See Nicosia, 'From Antony' and Nicosia, 'Tradition'.

²⁷ See Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique*, pp. 91-97.

²⁸ E. Sachau, *Die Handschriftenverzeichnisse der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin, Asher, 1899), I, pp. 321-335.

Analogous cases, in much later manuscripts, are: Berlin Staatsbibliothek Sachau 226 (nineteenth century),²⁹ where various commentaries to *Peri hermeneias* and *Prior Analytics* are associated with the Syriac translation of the *Techne grammatike*; the manuscript 61 part B of the Chaldean Diocese of Alqosh (nineteenth century),³⁰ quite miscellaneous in content, but including the commentaries to *Prior Analytics* and *Peri hermeneias* by Severus Sebokht and by Proba, an anonymous Syriac translation of *Prior Analytics*, Proba's commentary on *Peri hermeneias*, together with grammatical texts by Dawid bar Pawlos (late eight - early ninth century) and some brief lexicographical texts. Such evidence defines a broader field of Syriac language sciences, crossing the boundaries between disciplines, in which grammar and logic constitute an organic and progressive system of learning, going from orthoepy and word-analysis, to morpho-syntax and discourse parsing, to dialectic and, ultimately, the classification of real-world phenomena, categories of thought and the relation between them.³¹

Conversely, Antony of Tagrit's rhetorical work is usually transmitted on its own,³² with the exception of the most ancient extant manuscript hosting it, today split into two codicological units: British Library Add. 17208 + Deir al-Surian Syr. 32.³³ This witness, dated to the ninth century, also features, together with the *Rhetoric*, a number of Antony's other compositions. These texts have not received a thorough study yet, but they have the aspect of exercises that Antony composed for himself or as examples for his students to follow.³⁴

As for Barhebraeus' *Commentary to Rhetoric*, the text was transmitted together with the other works composing his *Cream of Wisdom*, and therefore is always accompanied by the other commentaries to the *Organon* and, usually, to the rest of the Aristotelian corpus.

The most interesting cases are in the manuscripts of Bar Šakko's *Dialogues*: Oxford Marsh. 528³⁵ and Jerusalem Saint Mark 233³⁶ lack the philosophical part of the *Dialogues*, but feature instead small treatises of grammatical content, such as discussions on points and verbal conjugations. Marsh. 528 also contains a few excerpts on religious matters and some folia from Elias of Nisibis' *Nomenclator*. Notably, manuscripts Marsh. 528 and British Library Add. 21454³⁷ host the only surviving fragment of the Syriac translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*.³⁸ However, the other manuscripts preserve a variety of treatises and works together with the *Dialogues*, lacking any apparent overall connection. Moreover, the various parts of the *Dialogues* were often transmitted separately, according to their final use, for instance in schools, and to the needs of those who commissioned their manuscripts.

3. A different approach to language sciences: orthoepy and punctuation

²⁹ Sachau, *Handschriftenverzeichnisse*, I, pp. 335-338.

³⁰ G. Kessel and Y. Arzhanov, 'Field Notes on Syriac Manuscripts III. A Previously Unknown Philosophical Manuscript from Alqosh', *Hugoye* 23.1 (2020), 99-130.

³¹ See also the manuscripts discussed in D. King 'Grammar and Logic in Syriac (and Arabic)', *JSS* 58.1 (2013), pp. 101-120.

³² Watt, *The Fifth Book*, pp. XI-XXV and Nicosia, 'Tradition'.

³³ W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Library* (London, Gilbert and Rivington, 1871-1872), volume 2, pp. 613-617 and S. P. Brock and L. Van Rompay, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts and Fragments in the Library of Deir al-Surian, Wadi al-Natrun (Egypt)* (Leuven, Peeters, 2014), pp. 244-248.

³⁴ See the discussion in Nicosia, 'Reassessing'. This copy seems the one that Antony made (or commissioned) for himself.

³⁵ R. Payne Smith, *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Bodleianae. Codices Syriacos, Carshunicos, Mandaeos complectens*, (Oxford, Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1864), pp. 642-644.

³⁶ F. Macler, *Notice des manuscrits Syriaques conservés dans la bibliothèque du couvent des syriens jacobites de Jérusalem*, (Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1920), pp. 24-25.

³⁷ Wright, *Catalogue*, volume 3, pp. 1165-1167.

³⁸ Text in D. S. Margoliouth, *Analecta Orientalia ad Poeticam Aristoteleam* (London, D. Nutt, 1887), pp. ۷۷-۷۷.

Besides the translation and redaction of grammars based on the Greek model, the Syriac linguistic tradition also developed a sophisticated orthoepic tradition, based on the use of a number of diacritical points that evolved over the centuries into an articulated system recording phonological, morpho-syntactical, prosodic and rhetorical information.

The defective Syriac writing system (an *abjad*, noting only consonants and some vowels through the non-systematic support of the letters noting the semi-vowels *y*, *w* and the consonants *ʿ*, *h*) gave rise to several homographs and ambiguous notations. Uncertainty in reading and the need to determine the correct interpretation of the Scriptures, gave rise to the earliest indigenous Syriac metalinguistic reflection, which took the form of textual annotation by means of diacritical marks (*nuqzē*, *puḥḥāmē*). Couples of homographs were distinguished by the use of a dot above or below the word. When a third homograph occurred, it was marked by a dot above plus a dot below. This simple and effective system evolved through the centuries with the notation of other phonological traits that could be crucial for the understanding of morpho-syntax: essentially vocalisation and lenition/redoubling of consonants. Punctuation was also used to convey prosodic and syntactical information. A simple system of three different signs (a sentence-final dot above the line, an intermediate dot separating two parts of one sentence, a lower dot dividing protasis from apodosis), was already in place in the fifth century.³⁹ These logical discourse marks developed into rhetorical accents which, through the combination of multiple dots, conveyed information about voice modulation and recitation. A list of thirteen early accents, already in use before the seventh century, has been drawn by Segal.⁴⁰ In addition to the main logical correlations, these accents expressed command, wonder, surprise, supplication, interrogation. In time, more sophisticated combinations of points were developed (Jacob of Edessa lists forty-seven accents).⁴¹ All the positions and combinations of dots were given names, according either to their position or to their function. Such names constituted a sophisticated metalanguage (*The net of points*, according to the grammarian Išo‘yahb bar Malkon, twelfth century). It created a bridge between different language sciences and was described in treatises that, while teaching the basic notions of correct reading, condensed fundamental notions of grammar, logic and rhetoric.

³⁹ Merx, *Historia*, pp. 64-65; J. B. Segal, *The Diacritical Point and the Accents in Syriac*, (London, Cumberlege, 1953), esp. pp. 58-65; E. J. Revell, ‘Aristotle and the Accents. The Categories of Speech in Jewish and Other Authors’, *JSS* 19/1 (1974), 19-35.

⁴⁰ Segal, *The Diacritical*, pp. 64-65.

⁴¹ Jacob of Edessa, *On Persons and Tenses*, in *A Letter by Mar Jacob, Bishop of Edessa, on Syriac Orthography; also a Tract by the Same Author, and a Discourse by Gregory Bar Hebræus on Syriac Accents*, ed. and trans. G. Phillips (London, Williams and Norgate, 1869), transl. pp. 13-33, ed. pp. *14-*24.