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Paola Cotticelli-Kurras (ed.)

Metalanguage, glossing and conceptualization in the grammars of the Middle Ages

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minimal acquaintance with Greek grammatical sources.³ At the same time, Greek metalinguistic categories, while acclimatizing, progressively shifted from the description of morphological features towards that of syntactic features proper of the Syriac language.⁴ In this paper, I will try to show how the Greek categories of ἄρθρον and πῶσις are integrated and re-elaborated by Syriac grammarians into a new system for delimitating a sub-class of affixes and designating their morphological behavior and their syntactic functions.

2. The category of ἄρθρον–*šārītā* in the earliest Syriac grammars

The Greek *Téchne grammatiké* represents the first and more influential model for the development of a Syriac grammatical theory, as it introduces the definition and denomination of the parts of speech and hence the core of metalinguistic terminology. The Syriac translation of the *Téchne* is attributed in some manuscripts (all belonging to the same East Syriac line of transmission) to the East-Syriac Joseph Huzaya (6th cent.).⁵ This translation or, rather, adaptation, only includes the chapters from the 11th onwards, and thus begins with a definition of the word (Syr. *met' amrānūtā*, Gr. λέξις) list of the parts of speech in Syriac, then in Greek transliterated in Syriac characters and, in some manuscripts (e.g. BL Add 14620), in Greek alphabet (see Table 1).

Gr. <i>Téchne</i>	ὄνομα	ῥῆμα	μετοχή	ἄρθρον	ἀντωνυμία	πρόθεσις	ἐπίρρημα	σύνδεσμος
Syr. <i>Téchne</i> (6 th c.)	<i>šmā</i> 'onoma	<i>memrā</i> rīma	<i>šawtpūtā</i> mētōkē	<i>šārītā</i> 'artrō	<i>hlāp šmā</i> 'antōnīmā	<i>mqadmūt syāmā</i> prōtasis	<i>'al memrā</i> 'epīrīmā	<i>'esārā</i> sīndēsīmōs
	noun	verb	participation	articulation	pronoun	preposition	adverb	conjunction

Table 1. The parts of speech in the Syriac *Téchne*

In what follows, I will focus on the Greek category of ἄρθρον and on its Syriac avatars *'artrō*, *šārītā* ('articulation') and *mappeltā* ('fall').

In order to understand how the passage on the Greek article has been integrated and adapted within the Syriac grammatical tradition, we need to keep in mind that Syriac has no definite article. Syriac nominals can feature in three so-called states:

absolute *ktāb* 'book, a book'
emphatic *ktāb-ā* '(the) book'
construct *ktāb*

³ Cf., for example, the 8th–9th cent. David bar Paulos, who, in his *Treatise on the alphabet*, seems to loosely follow ch. 6 of the Greek *Téchne*, of which no Syriac translation is extant (Gottheil 1893, Farina 2021b), or the 11th cent. Elias of Tirhan, who in the preface to his grammar, explicitly admits having consulted Greek grammarians before composing his own work (Bäthgen 1880: 4).

⁴ See, in this respect, what has been noticed about the description of compounds and of participle, respectively, in Farina (2019) and Farina (2021a).

⁵ See Merx (1889: 1–28), Contini (1998), Conti (2018).

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ABSTRACT

Early Syriac linguistic theories were modeled upon the Greek tradition, by means of translations and adaptation of rhetoric, logic and grammatical texts. In the domain of grammar, the main source of inspiration was the *Téchne Grammatiké*, considered to have been translated into Syriac in the 6th cent. and assimilated and manipulated by later Syriac authors. By examining the progressive integration and adaptation of the Greek category of ἄρθρον within the Syriac grammatical theory, this paper aims at showing how metalinguistic terms describing Greek morphological features can provide the conceptual and terminological tools for the identification of syntactic features of Syriac.

1. Introduction

This paper is devoted to a particular aspect of the adaptation of the categories elaborated by Ancient Greek Grammarians to the Syriac language, a phenomenon which is documented from the 6th cent. A.D. and that can be accounted for within the conceptual framework of “Greek extended grammar”.¹ In the case of the Syriac tradition, the Greek textual models are represented essentially by the *Téchne grammatiké*, Theodosius’ Canons and, on the side of logic, Aristotle’s *Peri Hermeneias* and its commentaries according to the alexandrine tradition. These models are essentially active in structuring a metalinguistic terminology, defining the parts of speech and their morpho-semantic features and building a bridge between technical grammar and logic and rhetoric teachings, as part of the Hellenistic curriculum, as it was assimilated in Syriac education.²

Throughout the entire productive period of grammatical literature (6th–13th cent.), Syriac authors have been constantly going back to Greek-based models, in the earliest stages more directly, by means of translations and adaptation of the Greek texts, later on through a reworking and reorganization of traditional materials, always presupposing a

¹ On this concept see Aussant/Dumarty (2021), for its application to the Syriac tradition see Farina (2021a).

² See the fundamental paper by Watt (1993) and also, more recently, King (2013).

Téchne, Proba's Commentary on *Peri Hermeneias* (6th cent.)²⁴, more specifically the commentary to section 16b, 19–20 of Aristotle's treatise: Ἀὐτὰ μὲν οὖν καθ' ἑαυτὰ λεγόμενα τὰ ῥήματα ὀνόματά ἐστι καὶ σημαίνει τι "Verbs in and by themselves are substantival and have significance". Proba presents the following example, aiming at determining the contexts in which a verbal form can have the role of a noun: 'āmar ger 'nās hāy d-āmar melā 'iteh "One can say that 'he says' is a verb"²⁵, which has (correctly) been considered as a Syriac translation of a subjacent (but unattested) Greek example Τὸ λέγει ῥῆμα ἐστὶ. About this sentence, Proba observes that: "this 'he says' [āmar] is set in the place of a noun; in fact, it is not just 'āmar, but d-'āmar, which, when this d- is added, which has the place of the article (*b-dukāt 'arthrōn*), fills the place of the noun". It is clear that in this passage, more or less contemporary to the translation of the *Téchne* (if the attribution to Huzaya is to be trusted), the word and the category of 'arthrōn are associated with the morphological element d-, a relative particle. This commentary is thus one of the earliest instances in which, unlike in the translation of the *Téchne*, we find a concrete Syriac linguistic content for the category of the article.

A crucial author for the study of the reception of Greek grammatical categories by the Syriac tradition is the West-Syriac bishop and polymath Jacob of Edessa (d. 708). Jacob is the author of two grammatical works: a treatise on punctuation, which is not based on a Greek grammatical model, and a grammar largely based on the Greek model of Theodose's *Canons*, the *Turoš mamlo*, which although celebrated by the later Syriac tradition, nowadays only survives in a few fragments that do not contain any reference to the category of 'arthrōn.²⁶ However, Jacob offers us a hint of his view on the matter in a non-grammatical text: the translation that he made of the *Homiliae Cathedrales* of Severus of Antioch (5th–6th c.).²⁷ Indeed, the translator added several linguistic commentaries, some of which are embedded in the translation itself, some others laid out on the margins of some of the oldest manuscript copies of the text. Some of such commentaries happen to be on 'arthrōn.

In Hom. CVII Severus is commenting upon the Isaiah verse 19,18, which, according to his reference version, the Septuagint, is: Πόλις-ασεδεκ κληθήσεται ἡ μία πόλις ("this one city will be called Polis-Asedek").²⁸ The Syriac translation of the passage *ašēdeq tetqrē hāy hḏā mdīntā* "Asedeq will be called this one city"²⁹ is followed by the commentary: «By this small addition of the article ('arthrōn), that is of this hāy ("this") [the text] shows the stronger sense of this meaning». This Syriac translation,

24) On this author see Brock (2011), Hugonnard-Roche (2004: 276–277 and *passim*).

25) Hoffmann (1869: 75) Syriac text, 100 Latin translation. In this case, we add a transliteration of the Syriac text, in order to make our argument easier to follow.

26) On Jacob's grammatical works see Talmon (2008), Farina (2018) and the introductory chapter in King/Merx *forthc.*

27) On this text and the vicissitudes of its Syriac translations see Brière (1960).

28) As Severus of Antioch was a prominent Anti-Chalcedonian Greek Church Father, his reference version for the Old Testament is mostly the Septuagint. Severus' texts were quickly obliterated within the Greek Chalcedonian milieu, but they survived in Syriac translation, as the Miaphysite Syriac Church venerated the figure of Severus.

29) Brière (1985: 189).

literally following the Greek text, does not correspond to the Peshitta version of the biblical passage. In fact, the verse has some textual difficulties and the original Hebrew crucially differs from the Greek Septuagint version. The text does not seem to follow the Syriac Hexapla either, as in that version we read *ašēdeq tetqrē hḏā mdīntā*, without the demonstrative *hāy*, which therefore seems to be rather an addition by Jacob himself.³⁰ From Jacob's translation and from his remark, we can deduct that, according to him, the Greek article can sometimes be translated by a demonstrative pronoun in Syriac, to which the grammatical term 'arthrōn can be applied.

Ms. BL Add. 12159 (868 AD)³¹ contains a copy of a subset of Severus' *Homiliae*, accompanied by several marginal notes by Jacob. Among the homilies contained in the ms. is also Hom. XXVIII, in which Severus gives a long explanation of the value of the article in the Greek passage ὁ κύριος μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (Jn 20,28), trying to show that it should not be interpreted as in support of a dyophysite doctrine³². On f. 43vB of Add. 12159, we can read the following remark by Jacob upon this passage: "In the Greek language there are certain parts of speech that are called 'arthrā (ΑΡΘΡΑ). They are placed before the nouns when they are ordered and laid within a sentence. And when for one person several names are given, it is not necessary that the article ('arthrōn) is placed in front of (all of) them, but just before one of them, in order not to convey a meaning of a plurality of persons...".

Finally, in Hom. CIX, Severus describes the importance of the presence of the article in Ex. 3,15 (Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν) Θεὸς Ἀβραάμ καὶ Θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Θεὸς Ἰακώβ, which is rendered in Syriac by Jacob as *haw alāheh d-abrāhām w-haw alāheh d-išāq w-haw alāheh d-ya'qūb* "The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". In this case, the Syriac text seems to presuppose a Greek version different from the Septuagint (and, also, from the Hebrew original): the definite article that is presupposed by the Syriac translation and rendered by the demonstrative *haw* "this" is not to be found in the biblical passage. The presence of the article is not only inferred by the presence of the Syriac demonstrative, but explicitly mentioned by Severus, as a crucial point in his argument: "The addition of the articles (ἄρθρα) before the nouns provides an important clue for this. Indeed, he did not say 'God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob', but carefully, for every single one of them, 'the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'...".³³ Whatever the source or the theological reason for this insertion may be, it is important here to notice that, on f. 248vB of Add. 12159, Jacob of Edessa notes "In the Greek language there are some small particles (lit. limbs *haddāmūnē z'ūrē*) that are called 'arthrā, that is articles (*šaryātā*), they are placed in front of the nouns, and they are not found in the Syriac language. And it is by necessity (*ananqī*) that we have put *haw* in front of the name of God, by saying «this God», where what is put before the nouns

30) Cf. Ceriani (1874: folio 179r). The Codex Ambrosianus published by Ceriani in a fac simile edition is the only witness for this passage of the Isaiah according to the Syro-Hexapla. On Jacob's handling and revision of the book of Isaiah in its Syriac versions see Ter Haar Romeny (2010), Juckel (2008, 2005), where, however, Is. 19 is not taken into consideration.

31) Wright (1870: v. II, 534–546).

32) Brière (1974: 46–47).

33) Brière (1985: 235–236).

shows that the realities designated by the nouns are specific and distinct, and not general.

These passages from the translation of Severus' homilies show us that Jacob, as a translator from Greek, was well aware of the presence and of the meaning of the Greek definite article. Moreover, he was familiar with the grammatical category of ἄρθρον, which he considered as a specific feature of Greek, not shared by Syriac, but that could often correspond, in their syntactico-semantic value, to a Syriac demonstrative.³⁴ Never does Jacob suggest that Syriac would have any morphosyntactic counterpart of the Greek article, nor that the forms in the emphatic state would have a definite/determinate meaning. Jacob does not use the Syriac equivalent *šārītā* either, and one could wonder whether the list of the parts of speech that we find in the translation of the *Téchne* was as meaningful for him as it will appear to be for some later Syriac grammarians. The fragmentary state of his grammar does not allow us to answer this question with certainty.

4. Stabilization of a metalinguistic category: 9th–11th cent.

If we now move to consider the definition of the term *'artrōn* given in later Syriac lexicography, we observe a constant reference to a preposed position. As was mentioned above (note 22), Bar Bahlūl, quoting from his 9th cent. predecessor Bar Serošway, lists the preposed particles *w-* “and”, *d-* (relative particle), *b-* “in”, *l-* “to” under the entries *'artrōn* and *'artrā*. The same opinion, as we will see, is shared by later Syriac grammarians, who mean by this term the prepositions *b-*, *d-*, *w-*, *l-*. Moreover, in the list of the eight parts of speech that Bar Bahlūl gives under the entry *meltā*, the order of the Greek and Syriac *Téchne* has been modified and *šārītā* has moved from fourth to sixth position, being thus grouped together with preposition (seventh) and conjunction (eighth) at the end of the list.³⁵

By means of this identification, the category of *'artrōn* intersects with another metalinguistic category, again adapted from the Greek tradition: that of case (*ptosis*, Syr. *mappeltā* “fall”). Already in the Syriac *Téchne*, we find an association between Syriac prepositions and functions associated with Greek cases, as Syriac does not have a complex nominal inflection nor a case system:

The cases of the nouns, like in the Greek language, are five, that is straight, genitive, dative, accusative and vocative. Straight is the one who is named, like *barnāšā* “man”, genitive is possessive or paternal, like *d-barnāšā* “of the man”, *d-sūsyā*, “of the horse”, dative is the name of the receiver, like in the expression *l-barnāšā* “to the man”, accusative is the name of the one who causes, like when one says *b-barnāšā* “through the man”, *men barnāšā* “by the man”, vocative is the name of the one who is called, like *ō barnāšā* “oh man”. (Merx 1889: 51*, my translation)

³⁴) An original association of the metalinguistic term ἄρθρον with the demonstrative is already found in part of the Greek grammatical tradition, namely the peripatetic Anaximenes of Lampsacus and some of the Stoics (see Traglia 1956: 62–63).

³⁵) Cf. n. 23 above and the table in Farina (2021a: 49) for a broader overview of the order of the parts of speech in the Syriac tradition.

When one compares the Greek cases as they are listed in the *Téchne grammatiké* with their corresponding Syriac names and examples, one gets the following list:

Nominative: ὀρθὴ ἄνθρωπος *trīšā 'īt* : *barnāšā* (man)
 Genitive: γενικὴ ἄνθρωπος *gensānā 'ūt* : *d-barnāšā*
 Dative: δοτικὴ ἄνθρωπος *metyahbānā 'ūt* : *l-barnāšā*
 Accusative: αἰτιατικὴ ἄνθρωπος *eltānā 'ūt* : *b-barnāšā, men barnāšā*
 Vocative: κλητικὴ ἄνθρωπος *metqaryānā 'ūt* : *ō barnāšā*

Although no explicit list of prepositions is given, this passage is at the base of the inventory of cases that we find in later grammarians. This association between cases and prepositions remains constant throughout the tradition. In Bar Bahlūl's *Lexicon* we find the list of the particles *b-* *d-* *w-* *l-* sub voce *ptōsis* (Greek loanword, defined by Bar Serošway as *mappūltā da-šmā 'aw d-meltā* “case of the noun or of the verb”).³⁶ In 11th century, we find the following definition in the Syriac grammar by the East-Syriac grammarian Elias of Nisibis (d. 1046):

The letters which are called cases [*mapplātā*] are four: *b-* *d-* *w-* *l-*. These letters are called cases because they fall (i.e. they come to stand) before nouns, as one says *b-pagrā, d-pagrā, w-pagrā, l-pagrā, b-sūsyā, w-sūsyā, l-sūsyā* ... (Gottheil 1887: 30, Syr. text 12*)³⁷

In this etymologizing definition, we find an explicit association between the category of *mappeltā* “case” and the preposed position of the particles that are designated by this term. This seems to be a further step towards the identification between *mappeltā* and *'artrōn*.

Finally, in a contemporary grammar by the East-Syriac Patriarch Elias of Tirhan (Elias I, d. 1049), we find an explicit equation of the categories of *'artrōn*, *šārītā* and *mappeltā*, associated with the prefixed position and with the preposition and particles *b-* *d-* *w-* *l-*, as well as with the functions of the Greek cases. Elia's grammar is structured as a series of thirty questions and answers. Question 16 is devoted to the Greek category of *'artrōn*: “The *'artra*, that is articles (*šāryātā*) or cases (*mapplātā*) in Syriac *b, d, l*, how are they prefixed to nouns?” (Bäthgen 1880: 19*, my translation). Question 18, instead, treats of the grammatical differences between Greek and Arabic, on the one hand, and Syriac on the other, with respect to inflection. Here Elias observes that Syriac “does not have the five «inclinations» (*mešalyānwātā*), that is *ptōsis*, that is *mapplātā* that Greek uses.” (Bäthgen 1880: 24*, my translation).

From these two observations, it emerges that the Syriac term *mappeltā* has (at least) two different meanings: it translates the Greek term πῶσις, either meant as a morphological feature that Syriac does not share with Greek, or as designating a syntactic function that in Syriac is covered by the preposed particles *b-* *d-* *w-* *l-*, which come to constitute over time a closed and formalized sub-class of particles (Syr. *'esārē*). In their turn, these particles can also be designated as *'artra* or *šāryātā*, when

³⁶) Duval (1901: v.II, 1535).

³⁷) I have adapted the transliteration of Syriac in the quotation to the system used in this paper, to facilitate the reading.

there are considered in their morphological facie of preposed elements, rather than in their morphosyntactic function of nominal “case-markers” (in the perspective of the Syriac grammarians).

5. Concluding remarks

A few observations can be added to this brief overview of the path followed by the Greek category of ἄρθρον into the Syriac grammatical theory.

First of all, the close examination of the manuscript witnesses of the Syriac translation(s) of the *Téchne* reveals a much less coherent and homogeneous text, than the one that Merx’s account has set at the foundation of Syriac grammatical tradition. As the earliest complete witness that we have is dated to the 9th cent., we do not know in which shape and to what extent a version of the Greek grammar had been circulating in the Syriac world in the previous centuries. Moreover, the variety of manuscript copies laying behind CPB 223 and its distance from the (corrupted) text of 9th cent. Add. 14620 witness to a quite inhomogeneous tradition, at least as far as the section we have examined is concerned. The fact that the earliest copies of the Syriac *Téchne* stem from a West-Syriac environment, whereas the later and more elaborated ones (including the version scattered through Bar Bahlül’s *Lexicon*) are East-Syriac also points to a more complex genesis of this translation. Finally, the reworking of the text that we can see in Bar Serošway and Bar Bahlül proves that the text of the *Téchne* was being red and used, but also that it was subject to reworking and re-adapting to a different understanding of the morphosyntax of Greek and Syriac, respectively.

As far as the evolution of the Syriac understanding of the category of ἄρθρον is concerned, the earliest sources (*Téchne*, Proba and Jacob of Edessa) display a predominance of a pronominal interpretation (relative, demonstrative), which is in line with the different values given to the term in the Greek linguistic tradition. A different morphosyntactic interpretation, in connection to the syntax of prepositions, prevails in later authors. However, in spite of this evolution, the Syriac grammatical tradition proves to be reluctant to abandon a metalinguistic term, although its direct Greek linguistic referent, the definite article, is not found in Syriac. The ἄρθρον is abandoned as a part of speech, but is persistent as a descriptive tool, delimitating the sub-class of prepositions that convey values corresponding to the Greek nominal declensions.

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