

## THE ORIGIN OF THE TERMS 'SYRIA(N)' & *SŪRYOYO* ONCE AGAIN

BY  
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Since the nineteenth century, a number of scholars have put forward various theories about the etymology of the basically Greek term 'Syrian' and its Aramaic counterpart *Sūryoyo*<sup>1</sup>. For a proper understanding of the history of these illustrious names in the two different languages, it will prove useful to analyze their backgrounds separately from one another.

First, I will discuss the most persuasive theory as regards the origin of the word 'Syria(n)'. Secondly, two hypotheses on the Aramaic term *Sūryoyo* will be examined. In the final part of this paper, a new contextual backdrop and sharply demarcated period will be proposed that helps us to understand the introduction of this name into the Aramaic language.

### 1. THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE GREEK TERM FOR 'SYRIA(N)'

Due to their resemblance, the ancient Greeks had always felt that 'Syria(n)' and 'Assyria(n)' were somehow onomastically related to each other<sup>2</sup>. Nöldeke was the first modern scholar who, in 1871, seriously formulated the theory that in Greek 'Syria(n)' is a truncated form of 'Assyria(n)'<sup>3</sup>. Even if his view has a few minor difficulties<sup>4</sup>, most writers still adhere to it.

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1) Cf., e.g., the review (albeit brief and inexhaustive) by A. SAUMA, "The origin of the Word Suryoyo-Syrian", in *The Harp* 6:3 (1993), pp. 171-197; R.P. HELM, 'Greeks' in the Neo-Assyrian Levant and 'Assyria' in Early Greek Writers (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation; University of Pennsylvania, 1980), especially chapters 1-2.

2) Cf. HELM, *Ibid.*, p. 31, where he even cites the interesting example of "[t]he editors of the twelfth-century *Etymologicon Magnum*" who "sought to derive 'Assyria' from 'Syria' through the device of an *alpha* privative".

3) T. NÖLDEKE, "ΑΣΣΥΡΙΟΣ ΣΥΡΙΟΣ ΣΥΡΟΣ [ASSYRIOS SYRIOS SYROS]", in *Hermes* 5 (1871a), pp. 443-468; cf. idem, "Über den Namen Assyriens", in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 1 (1931), pp. 373-399; idem, "Noch einmal über Assyrien und Syrien", in *ibid.* 87 (1932), pp. 261-263.

4) Cf. A. TVEDTNES, "The origin of the Name 'Syria'", in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

In 2006, however, Rollinger brought to our attention a recently published inscription, dated to the second half of the eighth century B.C., from the Turkish town called Çineköy, in the environs of Adana<sup>5</sup>. It contains a bilingual text, written in Luwian hieroglyphs and the Phoenician alphabet. In Phoenician, the toponym “Assyria” and the gentilic “Assyrians” are spelled as *ʾšr* and *ʾšrym* (probably transcribed as *Ašur* & *Ašurīm*, not *Ašūr* & *Ašūrīm*), while its Luwian counterpart has *Sura/i* to cover both forms (it was not uncommon in antiquity to employ a geographical name in the singular as a collective, denoting a group of people).

Rollinger argues that in the eighth century B.C., when the Assyrians dominated most of the Ancient Near East, “the Greeks established closer contacts with” southern Anatolia and northern Syria, where “Cilicia [i.e. the area where the Luwian statue was found] also played a crucial role”<sup>6</sup>. So rather than having corrupted ‘Syria(n)’ from ‘Assyria(n)’ in Greek, the Greeks may well have adopted the short form from these regions. This was perhaps from the Luwians, but scarcely from the Arameans or another Aramaic-speaking population in these territories, as Rollinger asserts (on which more below). In his judgment, the bilingual inscription even “provides incontrovertible proof that the Luwians used to pronounce ‘Assyria’ without the initial aleph”<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, he avers that it settles the etymological question “once and for all”<sup>8</sup>. Naturally, there is more to say about the interrelationship between ‘Syria(n)’ and ‘Assyria(n)’. Two names which have often caused an unnecessary confusion among writers who did not take into account the synchronic-diachronic approach, meaning that one has to study the sense of each name in the context of its first attestation and to follow it through subsequent eras. Such a study will reveal whether – and if indeed so, when, how and why – its root sense has evolved semantically, having acquired new connotations and/or meanings. One also has to beware of the so-called etymological fallacy, which incorrectly regards the original meaning of a given

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40 (1981), p. 139, who attempted to rebut the objections against Nöldeke’s theory by F. ROSENTHAL, *Die aramäische Forschung seit Th. Nöldeke’s Veröffentlichungen* (E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1939), pp. 3f., n.1.

5) R. ROLLINGER, “Assyrios, Syrios, Syros und Leukosyros”, in *Die Welt des Orients* 36 (2006a), pp. 72-82; idem, “The terms ‘Assyria’ and ‘Syria’ again”, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 65:4 (2006b), pp. 283-287.

6) Ibid. (2006b), p. 287; (2006a), pp. 74f.

7) Ibid. (2006b), p. 285. In his earlier published article (2006a, pp. 77ff), Rollinger suggested that the occurrence of *Sura/i* in the other Luwian hieroglyphic inscriptions similarly stands for the toponym “Assyria”.

8) Ibid. (2006b), p. 287.

word as essentially the same in all later periods and contexts.

Nöldeke had already done this instinctively in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>. Later experts, such as Helm, have provided us with further extensive studies in this regard. In his detailed analysis of 'Syria' and 'Assyria' in the Greek literature, Helm concludes that these two toponyms "among pre-Herodotean writers... were simply variant forms of the same geographical term with the same (albeit vague) geographical connotation"<sup>10</sup>. He further observes that Herodotus "always carefully distinguishes" the Levantine and Cappadocian 'Syrians' from the Mesopotamian 'Assyrians', thereby representing "a departure from normal Greek practice"<sup>11</sup>.

So Herodotus marks the turning point in the history of the separate ways of these names. But the real crux of the matter is Herodotus' assertion in his *Histories* (7.63), where he stated: "these are called 'Syrians' by the Greeks, but 'Assyrians' by the barbarians"<sup>12</sup>. If Helm's analysis of this line is correct<sup>13</sup>, this Herodotean statement *cannot* be invoked to prove the interchangeability of 'Syria(n)' and 'Assyria(n)' after the fifth century B.C.

The subsequent vague attestations of 'Assyria(n)', which name is often loosely used like 'Syria(n)', are generally not explained as denoting true Assyrians only by most scholars<sup>14</sup>, because Herodotus' differentiation of the two words was "lost upon later Classical authors, some of whom interpreted [his] *Histories VII.63* as a mandate to refer to Phoenicians, Jews, and any other Levantines as 'Assyrians'"<sup>15</sup>.

Be that as it may, the Septuagint, Posidonius, Josephus and early Christian works all bear witness to the fact that the Grecophone world, from about

9) Cf. his two articles cited above, n. 3.

10) HELM, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 33.

11) *Ibid.*, pp. 288 and 294.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 294.

13) *Ibid.*, pp. 287 and 294-305; O. LEUZE, *Die Satrapieneinteilung in Syrien und im Zweistromlande von 520-320* (Max Niemeyer Verlag, Halle [Saale], 1935), pp. 278 and 293.

14) Cf. NÖLDEKE, *op. cit.* (n. 3; 1871a), pp. 462-466; W.R. SMITH, "Ctesias and the Semiramis Legend", in *The English Historical Review* 2:6 (April 1887), pp. 312f.; R.A. ODEN, *Studies in Lucian's De Syria Dea* (Scholars Press, 1977), p. 3, n. 6; F. MILLAR, *The Roman Near East: 31 BC – AD 337* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 227, 293f., 245f., 454-456 and 460.

15) P.R. HELM, "Herodotus *Histories VII.63* and the Geographical Connotations of the Toponym 'Assyria' in the Achaemenid Period" (paper presented at the 190<sup>th</sup> meeting of the American Oriental Society, at San Francisco, April 1980), cited by J. JOSEPH, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, and Colonial Powers* (E.J. Brill, Leiden, 2000), p. 21.

the fourth or third century B.C. on, restricted the name ‘Syrian’ to the Aramaic language and the Arameans – wherever they were to be found, as Nöldeke stressed, whether in Syria proper or as far east as lower Babylonia<sup>16</sup>.

Thus it is crucial to keep in mind the linguistic principle that an etymon (i.e. the form from which another word has evolved historically) does not, by definition, mean that its derivations have preserved the original root sense(s). Due to a variety of reasons, however, words and names can obtain new connotations and meanings in the course of history. Again, the term ‘Syria(n)’ is a case in point. In addition to its later meaning of ‘Aram(ean)’, its semantic wanderings have currently reached their final destination, signifying *also* the country, the national language and the predominantly Muslim Arab citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic.

## 2. TWO INFLUENTIAL HYPOTHESES ON THE ARAMAIC NAME *SŪRYOYO*

In spite of the already noted confusion that existed among post-Herodotean Greeks and Romans, there was no such thing among the early Aramaic-speaking Christians who were well-versed in Greek. In their native tongue, there was always a clear distinction between ܐܫܘܪܝܐ *Oṭūr* / ܐܫܘܪܝܐ *Oṭūroye* (“Assyria/Assyrians”) and ܫܘܪܝܐ *Sūrīya* / ܫܘܪܝܐ *Sūryoye* (“Syria/Syrians”)<sup>17</sup>, as these terms were entirely different in sound and speech as well as in meaning. In fact, the closest one can get to an outward resemblance in Edessan Aramaic between ‘Assyria(ns)’ and ‘Syria(ns)’ are *Greek transliterations* of the first name<sup>18</sup>. Significantly, it did not come to their mind to develop the idea that *the names* of the Assyrians of old and their Syrian community were one way or another interrelated throughout history.

1. This brings me to the first of two prevailing theories, both of which I must deal with very succinctly here<sup>19</sup>, concerning the provenance of the word *Sūryoyo*. The effort to derive this name from *Oṭūroyo* (or: *Ašūroyo*)

16) See NÖLDEKE, *op. cit.* (n. 3 [1871a], pp. 461f. and 468; idem, “Die Namen der aramäischen Nation und Sprache”, in *ZDMG* 25 (1871b), pp. 113 and 115f.

17) This significant point was also made by JOSEPH, *op. cit.* (n. 15), p. 20.

18) For instance, the twelfth-century patriarch Michael, citing Flavius Josephus, transliterated the Greek ethnonym for “Assyrians” into his language as *Asūroye* (ܐܫܘܪܝܐ), whom he distinguished from the *Sūryoye* (ܫܘܪܝܐ “Syrians”). See J.-B. CHABOT, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d’Antioche (1166-1199)*, II.3 (Paris, 1899), p. 748 (ST) & p. 442 (FT). Michael also stated that those who descended from Ašūr [ܐܫܘܪ], one of the sons of Sem (Gen 10:22), “were called Ašūrians [ܐܫܘܪܝܐ “Assyrians”], i.e. Aṭūrians [ܐܬܘܪܝܐ “Assyrians”].

19) I plan to return to them more extensively in a forthcoming publication.

can be envisaged as follows: *Otūroyo* > *Osūroyo* (sound shift from *t* to *s*) > (*'*)*sūroyo* (aphaeresis) > *Sūroyo* > *Sūryoyo* (inclusion of the letter *y*).

The widely circulating theory of scholars who interpreted Greek 'Syria' linguistically as an abridged form of 'Assyria', probably gave birth to the idea that these names were *also* onomastically related in *Aramaic*. But this development is really a modern endeavour and has no basis in historical fact. It is a straightforward product of the Syrian nationalist awakening from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, which received a major boost after World War I<sup>20</sup>.

It is against this context that the artificially constructed term ܣܘܪܝܝܐ (*'*)*sūrāyē* "(As)syrians" surfaced for the first time in 1897, according to Heinrichs, in an article by an East-Syrian<sup>21</sup>. Because the history of the Syrians had "to be assyrianized", one way to achieve this goal, besides changing their name from *Sūr(y)āyā* to *Atūrāyā* ("Assyrian"), was to render *Sō/ūrāyē* "in reprints with an initial aleph, though provided with a *linea occultans*, as (*'*)*sōrāyē*, in order to bring it graphically closer to *ātōrāyē*"<sup>22</sup>. West-Syrians did not remain immune to this trend.

Hence Macuch rightly concluded that "[t]his simple philological equation is doubtful"<sup>23</sup>. Heinrichs also judged that this process "did not evolve in Syriac"<sup>24</sup>. Taking the artificial form ܣܘܪܝܝܐ seriously in an attempt to clarify the etymology of *Sūryoyo*<sup>25</sup>, is therefore pointless.

2. A similar but more advanced theory of the etymology of *Sūryoyo* was recently presented by Parpola<sup>26</sup>, who was followed by Rollinger. However

20 Cf., e.g., JOSEPH, *op. cit.* (n. 15), *passim* (especially pp. 1-32, for a review of the various names either used by or applied to the Arameophone Christian communities). Also consult the sources cited in the next two notes.

21) W. HEINRICHS, "The modern Assyrians – Name and Nation", in R. CONTINI *et al.* (eds.), *Semítica: Serta Philologica Constantino Tsereteli dicata* (Torino, 1993), p. 102. He failed to notice that in the very same year Tuma Audo (1853-1917), the Chaldean scholar and Archbishop of Urmia in Iran, also subscribed to this supposed origin of *Sūryoyo* in the preface to his famed dictionary (p. 9). See R. MACUCH, "Assyrians in Iran", in E. YARSHATER (ed.), *Encyclopedia Iranica*, IV (London and New York, 1987), p. 818 (right column).

22) MACUCH, *ibid.* For more on assyrianization attempts, cf. *idem*, *Geschichte der spät- und neuassyrischen Literatur* (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin & New York, 1976), pp. 89f., 206 and 233; JOSEPH, *op. cit.* (n. 15), pp. 18-20.

23) MACUCH, *op. cit.* (n. 21), p. 818 (right column).

24) HEINRICHS, *op. cit.* (n. 21), p. 103.

25) As does S. PARPOLA, "Nation and Ethnic Identity in the Neo-Assyrian Empire and Assyrian Identity in post Empire Times", in *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Studies* 18:2 (2004), p. 18.

26) *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18. Cf. also his "Assyrians after Assyria", in *Ibid.* 12:2 (2000), pp. 8-11.

creative and attractive his thesis may be, it involves several difficulties and runs counter to established linguistic and historical facts. Here I will confine myself to two of my main objections against his hypothesis.

First, Parpola did not give a single example of the alleged Neo-Assyrian self-designation *\*Sūrāyā*, for the simple reason that such a name did not exist in pre-Christian Assyrian<sup>27</sup> or Aramaic. He obviously relied too much on the already mentioned artificial form (*'*)*sūroyo* that was constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Secondly, what he actually did with the mere three examples he provided was elevate a *defective* spelling of the *divine name* Assūr (< Aššūr), which he found in Aramaic texts from the seventh century B.C., to a rule. After normalizing it, he extended this exceptional form *Sūr* both to the self-ascription of the Assyrians by claiming the variant *\*Sūrāyu* and to their country/empire by suggesting the shortened but again unattested form *\*Sūr*. That they were imported into Aramaic after the Assyrians adopted this language is thereby also disproven.

It is in these two aspects that Rollinger followed Parpola<sup>28</sup> and hence should be corrected. And so must be Rollinger's view that the Luwian term *Sura/i* for geographical "Assyria" was taken over by the Arameans or another Aramaic-speaking population in northern Syria who purportedly spread it further east<sup>29</sup>.

### 3. *SŪROYO*, AN ARAMAICIZED FORM OF THE GREEK *SŪRIOS*

Allow me first to clarify two opposing words which I will use more than once from now on. The first one is 'endonym' or 'autonym', which is the name that members of an ethnic group apply to themselves. An 'exonym', by contrast, is the name which outsiders apply to the ethnic group. Having said this, the main questions which I hope to answer in brief from

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27) At least this hypothetical name was not significant enough for the Assyriologists who have contributed to the issue of the Assyrian identity and self-perception, so as to mention it in their studies. Cf., e.g., P. MACHINIST, "Assyrians in Assyria in the first Millennium B.C.", in K. RAAFLAUB (ed.), *Anfänge politischen Denkens in der Antike: Die nahöstlichen Kulturen und die Griechen* (Oldenbourg, München, 1993), pp. 77-104, for the known Assyrian self-designations in the royal inscriptions, namely "*aššurū* (< *aššuriu*) or *aššuraya*" (p. 82). Evidently, an autonym *\*Sūrāyā* was unknown to Machinist and others who have written on Assyrian self-identification.

28) ROLLINGER, *op. cit.* (n. 5; 2006a), pp. 285f.

29) *Ibid.* (2006a), pp. 74f.

this point on are the following: when, why and by whom was the eventual autonym *Sūryoyo* imported into which Aramaic dialect, and under which circumstances?

It is my contention that these questions can best be understood in view of two interrelated historical processes in the long history of the Arameans of old. I will elucidate them under the headings of the pre- and post-Christian Hellenization of this ancient people.

*a. Pre-Christian Hellenization: Renaming of Indigenous Nations*

The Aramaic name *Sūryoyo* can best be explained against the backdrop of the increasing Hellenization of the local populace in Mesopotamia from the fourth century B.C. onward. This process symbolized a mutual interaction between the Grecophone conquerors and their largely Arameophone subjects in the East in the domains of language, culture and religion. Even so, in at least one area it was the Greek language that asserted itself as more powerful than Aramaic. It concerned the *onomastic* field. Peoples, toponyms and cults were named, if not *renamed*, after Greek fashion without regard for their long-established indigenous names. The first-century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, was keen to witness this fact:

Of the nations some still preserve the names which were given them by their founders, some have changed them, while yet others have modified them to make them more intelligible to their neighbours. *It is the Greeks who are responsible for this change of nomenclature*; for when in after ages they rose to power, they appropriated even the glories of the past, *embellishing the nations with names which they could understand* and imposing on them forms of government, as though they were descended from themselves<sup>30</sup>. [My emphasis.]

The thrust of my argument is that the Arameans also fell victim to this increasing aspect of Hellenization. Once the Greeks began to rule the Near East and controlled the Aramean and largely Aramaized territories, they restricted the formerly catch-all term 'Syrian' to the Arameans, including their language, culture and lands. Some nations chose to modify their autonym, while others abandoned it and took over the Greek version. Yet, other nations did not succumb that quickly to this outward pressure and the Arameans are a case in point.

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30) See his *Jewish Antiquities* (1.5.5), cited and briefly discussed by MILLAR, *op. cit.* (n. 14), p. 9.

Posidonius († 51 B.C.) and Strabo († ca. 24 A.D.) declared that the Greeks designated the Arameans as ‘Syrians’, but added that they still called themselves ‘Arameans’. Josephus reaffirms that Aram, the son of Sem, “ruled the Aramaeans, whom the Greeks term Syrians”<sup>31</sup>. Save for a few exceptions, therefore, the Grecophone world was all but familiar with the endonym of the Aramean, whom the Greek-speaking world always named ‘Syrians’ and their language ‘Syrian’<sup>32</sup>. But times and circumstances would change in the Christian epoch. In the ensuing centuries, the Arameans eventually followed suit by replacing their autonym by the Greek exonym that was widely used in the ever-increasing Hellenized Aramean world.

*b. Post-Christian Hellenization: The Greco-Aramaic Translation Movement*

First, it is significant to stress that, of all the groups from the Christian era onward, only the Syrian-speaking communities thought of themselves as ‘Arameans’. Conclusive evidence for an identification with this pre-Christian people can be gathered from the writings generated by their *literati*, from Afrem in the fourth century to Bar-‘Ebroyo in the thirteenth, and still later. In the same way, it was the Syrians who were the only Arameophone group in Late Antiquity who called themselves and their language *Sūryoyo*. We must ask ourselves, therefore, when, why, in what way and by whom this ethnonym was introduced into Edessan Aramaic<sup>33</sup>.

Edessa and its environs continue to be portrayed as fundamentally Hellenized. But Healey most recently evaluated the evidence of a cultural Hellenization in the period up to the mid-third century A.D. and asserted “that some retraction from the retraction is necessary, since there is a danger of exaggeration of the hellenistic factor in early Edessa”<sup>34</sup>. After reviewing the

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31) Cited and briefly elaborated by MILLAR, *op. cit.* (n. 14), p. 7. Cf. Gen 10:22.

32) Cf. Th. NÖLDEKE, “Namen und Wohnsitze der Aramäer”, in *Ausland* 33-34 (1867), p. 780: “wo es sich um die Bezeichnung der Nationalität handelt, setzen die Griechen immer Syrer, Syrisch, ganz wie die Morgenländer Aram, aramäisch”. Idem, *op. cit.* (n. 16; 1871b), p. 115: “Die Griechen haben den Namen ‘Aramäer’ nie eigentlich gekannt... Die Griechen nannten das Volk ‘Syrer’”. Cf. E. LIPiŃSKI, *The Arameans. Their History, Culture, Religion* (Leuven, 2000), p. 52.

33) How, why and under which circumstances large numbers of *Christian* Arameans were willing to give up the name of their ancestors and substitute it for a wholly foreign name, is none of my concern in this study.

34) J.F. HEALEY, “The Edessan Milieu and the Birth of Syriac”, in *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 10:2 (Summer 2007), § 5 (<http://syrcom.cua.edu/hugoye/Vol10No2/HV10N2Healey.html>).



archaeological, literary and linguistic evidence, he arrived at the conclusion that “the Edessan milieu” before ca. 250 A.D. “was not hellenized to any significant extent”<sup>35</sup>.

Now, I have already noted that the word *Sūryoyo* was absent from pre-Christian Aramaic texts. Although I cannot argue this point in full now, my personal experience with the early primary sources in Edessan Aramaic makes me believe that this name was probably first coined in a Hellenized milieu at the so-called ‘School of Edessa’<sup>36</sup>, sometime between 390 and 430 A.D. (perhaps even 400-420 A.D.). Afrem, in fact, was not acquainted with the term *Sūryoyo*: he only knew and employed *Armāyā* as the natural autonym for his people and native language. Indeed, the way he utilized this ethnonym shows no trace of external borrowing, but reveals that he was part of an old tradition that had inherited this name. It is especially interesting that his use of the endonym *Armāyā* occurs in his most Hellenized texts, dated to the last years of his life and written at the major center of Hellenism in Mesopotamia since the late fourth century. Had the term *Sūryoyo* existed during the 370s, Afrem certainly would have used it - if not instead of the ancient name *Armāyā*, at least he would have employed it *alongside* this time-honoured endonym<sup>37</sup>. Hence I believe that Afrem’s decease in 373 A.D. provides a solid *terminus post quem* for the name *Sūryoyo* in Aramaic, more specifically in Edessan Aramaic.

So, this endonym of the Arameans of old continued at least until the close of the fourth century A.D. After Afrem’s death, the bilingual translators at the ‘School of Edessa’ knew that the Greeks had designated the Aramean people and the Aramaic language for centuries by the Greek name of *Súrioi/Súroi* (“Syrians”); just like today’s English-speaking world uses ‘German’ and ‘Armenian’ to refer to the nations who call themselves *Deutscher* and *Hay*.

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35) *Ibid.*, § 33.

36) Cf. A.H. BECKER, *Fear of God and the beginning of wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2006), p. 43. “The use of the term ‘school’ here is chronologically and categorically ambiguous and potentially misleading”. Although Becker questions the early existence of such an educational institution, he does recognize Edessa as “a center of learning from the second century [A.D.] onward” (p. 42). There can be no doubt either about the famous translation movement in Edessa, which grew exponentially from the early fifth century A.D. on.

37) Consider that Afrem’s unfamiliarity with this Aramaicized Greek term is in perfect agreement with his “comparatively unhellenized” Aramaic *language and vocabulary*. Cf. S.P. BROCK, “Greek Words in Ephrem and Narsai: A Comparative Sampling”, in *ARAM* 11-12 (1999-2000), pp. 439-449 (here p. 449, n. 45).

It requires little imagination, then, to picture a Greek-oriented Aramean translator from Edessa sometime between A.D. 390 and 430 who was inspired to coin a proximate Aramaic counterpart of the Greek name for the Aramean people and language, which in his native tongue had obtained the connotation of ‘Gentile’, but not yet “pagan, heathen”<sup>38</sup>. Contrary to the ethnonym *Sūryoyo*, early in the fifth century the toponym *Sūrīa*, which represents the *Greek* form for “Syria”, was known for a few centuries. Comparable *Greek transliterations* of toponyms that had entered Edessan Aramaic at an early date, consist of names like Phrygia (ܦܪܝܓܝܐ)<sup>39</sup>, Gaul/Gallia (ܟܠܘܕܝܐ)<sup>40</sup>, and Germany (ܟܝܡܢܝܐ)<sup>41</sup>. When the standard Aramaic gentilic ending *-āyā* was attached to *Sūrīa*, it logically produced, under the concomitant influence of, and inspiration by, the Greek name *Súrios*, the ethnonym *Sūryāyā* (< *Sūrīāyā*)<sup>42</sup>.

It turns out that the time and circumstances for this appellation were also right. Since the early fifth century A.D. there was a growing appreciation of Greek thinking, expression and learning among Christian Aramean scholars from Edessa. “In the period with which we are dealing”, Brock noticed, “the prestige of Greek is continually on the increase”<sup>43</sup>. This is primarily indicated by the expanding translation activities at the local school as well as the momentous impact the Greek language would have on Aramaic for the

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38) In the light of my findings, a few of Nöldeke’s conclusions (accepted and summed up by HEINRICH, *op. cit.* [n. 21], p. 103) should be modified. Notably his belief that the Arameans, once they had converted to Christianity, immediately had forsaken their autonym *Armāyā*, since it purportedly had acquired the pejorative sense of “pagans, heathens” in their language. The remarkably *positive* connotation of the religious sense of *armāyā* among Christian Arameans like Afrem and Jacob of Serugh, who moreover still employed *Armāyā* in its primary meaning, begs for another explanation of this decisive moment in the process of the *Namenswechsel* of the Christian Arameans.

39) Cf. Acts 2:10; 16:6; 18:23 and H.J.W. DRIJVERS, *The Book of the Laws of the Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen, 1965), p. 44 (text; line 3) & p. 45 (transl.).

40) DRIJVERS, *Ibid.*, p. 60 (text; line 4) & p. 61 (transl.).

41) *Ibid.*, p. 50 (text; line 13) & p. 51 (transl.).

42) Cf. J. PAYNE SMITH, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976<sup>4</sup>; 1903<sup>1</sup>); p. 371, who also derived *Sūryoyo* “from ܟܠܘܕܝܐ [*Sūrīya*]”; W. WITAKOWSKI, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahrē: A Study on the History of Historiography* (Uppsala, 1987), p. 76, n. 2, who likewise traces the name *Sūryāyā* to “the toponym Συρία”. NÖLDEKE, *op. cit.* (n. 16; 1871b), p. 116, thought that this new term was anchored in Greek *Súroi* (+ *-āyā* = \**Súroiāyā*), which form does not appear to be convincing.

43) S.P. BROCK, “Towards a history of Syria translation technique”, in R. LAVENANT (ed.), *III Symposium Syriacum 1980* (Rome, 1983), p. 4.

next three centuries. According to Brock's many studies<sup>44</sup>, the development of the chiefly linguistic Hellenization of the early Christian Aramean history and the Aramaic dialect of Edessa can be outlined accordingly:

The 4<sup>th</sup> century was quintessentially un-Hellenized;

The 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> centuries, by contrast, exemplify a quickly developing transition period;

Finally, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century this long process of Hellenization reaches its climax.

Brock further observed that the "transition from free to an exceedingly literal technique of translation can be seen readily by comparing the Old Syriac, Peshitta, Philoxenian (as far as this can be reconstructed) and the Harklean gospels"<sup>45</sup>. Applying this method or approach by comparing the Greek name of *Súros* at Lk 4:27 with the earliest Aramaic NT versions, yields:

Sinaitic:	ܢܚܡܝܐ	<i>Armāyā</i>	"The Aramean"
Peshitta:	ܢܚܡܝܐ	<i>Na'mon Armāyā</i>	"Naaman the Aramean"
Harklean:	ܢܚܡܝܐ	<i>Na'mon haw Sūryoyo</i>	"Naaman the Syrian" <sup>46</sup>

In such an advancing Hellenized milieu, then, there may have developed around 400 A.D. the need for a close counterpart or a mirror translation of the Greek appellation *Súrios/Súros*, and the Aramaicized Greek name

44) For the Greek impact that led to palpable changes in the orthography, morphology, lexical stock and syntactic features of Edessan Aramaic, cf. S.P. BROCK; "Some Aspects of Greek Words in Syriac", in A. DIETRICH (ed.), *Synkretismus im syrisch-persischen Kulturgebiet* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1975), pp. 80-108. "Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity", in *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 20 (Durham, 1979), pp. 69-87; "Greek into Syriac and Syriac into Greek", in *Journal of the Syriac Academy* 3 (Baghdad, 1977), pp. 1-17 (Arabic pp. 422-406); "Diachronic Aspects of Syriac Word Formation: An Aid for Dating Anonymous Texts", in R. LAVENANT (ed.), *V Symposium Syriacum 1988* (Rome, 1990), pp. 321-330; "Greek and Syriac in Late Antique Syria", in A.K. BOWMAN & G. WOOLF (eds.), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 149-160 and 234-235; "Greek Words in Syriac: Some General Features", in *Studia Classica Israelica* 15 (1996), pp. 251-262; "Some diachronic features of Classical Syriac", in M. BAASTEN & W.T. VAN PEURSEN (eds.), *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor T. Muraoka on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Peeters, Leuven, 2003), pp. 95-111.

45) S.P. BROCK, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning", in N. GARSOÏAN *et al.* (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., 1982), p. 18.

46) G.A. KIRAZ, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshitta and Harklean Versions*, III. Luke (E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1996), p. 71.

*Sūryoyo* could be readily accepted as felicitous. Moreover, in the mounting tendency to follow the Greek texts still more exactly, the ethnonym would be cordially welcomed by the industrious members of the Greco-Aramaic translation movement.

When the Greek inspired name *Sūryoyo* penetrated into Edessan Aramaic, it did *not* carry or introduce the old historical changes which this confusing term had in Greek and Latin, as discussed above. So there never arose any kind of misapprehension with respect to its use and meaning, which occurred more than once among Greek/Latin writers after the fifth century B.C. For the *Sūryoye*, the name symbolized their by now *Christianized Aramean* identity.

A post-Afremic era for the introduction of the newly coined appellation *Sūryoyo* accords well with the portrait of Syrian history in the early fifth century. For in the pre-Afremic period, very few works seem to have been translated from Greek into Edessan Aramaic. It was only around 400-430 A.D. that Edessa would develop into the unrivalled centre of predominantly Christocentric Aramaic literature and Aramean Christendom in the entire region<sup>47</sup>.

The translation activities into Aramaic increased speedily after the close of the fourth century, as copious theological and secular writings found their way into Edessan Aramaic before the mid-seventh century. This picture is in keeping with the earlier suggested introduction of the Aramaic name *Sūryoyo* in the Edessan area sometime between 390 and 430. As noted before, one can even sense a change of mind and attitude in this metropolis towards the Greek language, culture and education<sup>48</sup>. This bilingual environment created an ideal setting for the Aramean reception of the Aramaicized Greek name *Sūrios/Sūros*.

Once coined and incorporated into Edessan Aramaic, the term *Sūryoyo* coexisted for a while with the autonym *Armāyā*. This way, there emerged a *transition period*, which probably can be roughly dated to between A.D. 440 and 500. After the new name gained in prestige, the traditional endonym became outmoded and finally fell into abeyance; however, both the East- and West-Syrians at times kept identifying themselves and their language as “Aramean; Aramaic” (ܐܪܡܝܐ) until well into the fourteenth century, if not still later.

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47) Th. NÖLDEKE, *Die semitischen Sprachen: Eine Skizze* (Leipzig, 1899<sup>2</sup>), p. 35, aptly called Edessa the capital of “der aramäischen Christenheit”.

48) Cf. BROCK’S “From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning” (n. 45), which title most clearly conveys this message.

Two mechanisms in particular were responsible for the wide circulation of the ethnonym *Sūryoyo*, viz. the Edessan Aramaic dialect in which this name was coined and the Syrian churches which had adopted and internalized this Aramaicized Greek term as their new autonym.

O'Leary's depiction of the Christian church as "a missionary of Greek intellectual culture as well as of the Christian religion"<sup>49</sup>, fits well to the Aramaic church between the late fourth and seventh century. He further held that it was the church, "a Hellenizing force"<sup>50</sup>, "more than anything else which brought about the Hellenization of" Mesopotamia<sup>51</sup>. Once *Sūryoyo* was "naturalized in Syriac", this appellation "was assured of a very wide fusion, for Syriac, like Imperial Aramaic before it, spread as a written language right into the heart of Asia, and in its role as a missionary language Syriac served incidentally as the vehicle for" the spread of the name<sup>52</sup>. Indeed, following the death of Ibas (ca. 436-457), who succeeded Rabbula as the bishop of Edessa, and above all after the closure of the School of Edessa by the emperor in 489, since it was perceived as a stronghold of 'Nestorianism', many learned men left the Edessan metropolis for Persia, where some alumni became bishops and metropolitans<sup>53</sup>. Among the things they had learned in Edessa and which they further promoted was, of course, the new and appealing self-designation of the Christian Arameans and their language: *Sūryoyo*.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Western appellation 'Syrian' and its Aramaic equivalent *Sūryoyo* have generated much discussion and misunderstanding in the past decades. Hence I decided to discuss their origins separately from each other, in order to gain a better understanding of the two names.

In the case of 'Syria(n)', I accepted the dominant view that this term ultimately derives from the root 'Assyria(n)'. In view of a bilingual inscription dated to about 744-705 B.C., which Rollinger brought to our attention, the appellative 'Syria(n)' was perhaps not shortened by the Greeks, Assyrians

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49) D.L. O'LEARY, *How Greek science passed to the Arabs* (London, 1949), p. 19.

50) *Ibid.*, p. 36 (cf. p. 39).

51) *Ibid.*, p. 43.

52) BROCK, *op. cit.* (n. 44; 1975), pp. 81f.

53) See the letter written by Bishop Simeon of Beth Arsham († 540) regarding Barsauma the bishop of Nisibis and the 'Nestorian' doctrine in manuscript Vat. Syr. 135, fol. 24a-27a. First published by J.S. ASSEMANI, *BO*, 1 (Rome, 1719), pp. 346-358.

and Arameans, but by the Luwians or a related people in southern Anatolia from whom the Greeks borrowed this aphetic variant. After the long and the short form coexisted and were utilized synonymously for the next centuries, Herodotus, as Helm argued, was the first writer who began to distinguish the two words from each other. His deliberate distinction between the terms would pave the way for confusion and misrepresentation of his own view. What seems to be quite certain, though, is that the name 'Syrian' was applied to the Arameans from about the fourth or third century B.C. on. Yet, the two names were never equally understood by Greek (and Latin) writers who kept using them occasionally indiscriminately.

Next an evaluation was given of two influential hypotheses concerning the root of the Aramaic name *Sūryoyo*. The adherents of the first theory claim that it has developed from *Otūroyo*, but there is no proof for such an evolution in the history of the Aramaic language. The second suggestion was made by Parpola who attempted to revive and confirm this theory. He asserted that the ancient Assyrians designated themselves in Assyrian, and later also in Aramaic after they had adopted this language, as *\*Asūrāyā* which evolved into *\*Sūrāyā*. It was shown, however, that such an Assyrian and Aramaic autonym did not exist in antiquity. Parpola's etymological explanation, therefore, is unconvincing and even untenable.

Personally, I believe the ethnonym *Sūryoyo* can best be explained and understood against the backdrop of the growing Hellenization of the Aramaic-speaking populations in Edessa and its surroundings. The Arameans were initially capable of withstanding this process until the third quarter of the fourth century A.D. But since approximately the final decade of the fourth, certainly around the early fifth century A.D., the Christian Arameans invented the term *Sūryoyo*. Constructed upon the toponym *Sūrīa*, which is clearly Greek in form and which had existed at least since the second century A.D. in Edessan Aramaic, *Sūryoyo* may be conceived of as the Aramaicized version of the Greek *Sūrios*. It seems very likely to me that this coinage or neologism may have been accomplished at the 'School of Edessa', somewhere between 390 and 430 A.D.; instinctively, I am inclined to date it even more precisely between 400 and 420. It seems quite certain that the eventual autonym *Sūryoyo* did exist shortly before the Aramean church split up into a Western and Eastern branch from the mid-fifth century onward.

Since the members of the Greco-Aramaic translation movement at Edessa were Greek-oriented and became increasingly philhellenic, it offered a suitable setting for the acceptance of the Greco-Aramaic term. After its en-

trance into Aramaic, there was a *transition period* until the late fifth century during which the two autonyms, the old and the new one, were used side by side. The two main vehicles that were responsible for the wide spread of the name *Sūryoyo* in various other Aramaic vernaculars, some of which are still in existence in evolved stages, were the church as the new Hellenizing force and the Edessan Aramaic dialect which the Aramaic church had adopted as its spoken, literary and liturgical language.

Interestingly, the fifth century A.D. shows a transition period during which the Aramaic names for 'Syrian; Syriac' (ܣܘܪܝܝܐ) and 'Aramean; Aramaic' (ܐܪܡܝܐ) were used alongside each other. *Sūryoyo*, the Aramaicized name of the Greek term *Sūrios*, eventually came to be used as a self-designation by the Christian Arameans at the expense of the originally Aramaic autonym *Armāyā*, which at a later date developed into *Oromoyo* (*Ārāmāyā*) in West-Syriac. In any case, until well into the fourteenth century, and even up to the modern era, both East- and West-Syrian scholars from time to time expressly continued to refer to their people and language as ܣܘܪܝܝܐ, to be translated as "Aramean" and "Aramaic" respectively.