The Semitic name Aramean and the Greek term Syrian
The Semitic name ‘Aramean’ and the Greek term ‘Syrian’

The Syriac language is the Aramaic language itself, and the Arameans are the Syrians themselves. He who has made a distinction between them has erred. — Syriac Orthodox Patriarch H.H. Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas

The history of the Semitic name ‘Aramean’

It is often stated that after the mass conversion of the Arameans to Christianity, the Greek-inspired term Suryāyē/Suryoyē (“Syrians”) was adopted at the expense of their traditional name. And due to the Aramaic New Testament (NT), their name had come to mean “pagans, heathens” in their language (see below). Although this 19th-century theory became accepted and influential, it remains unchallenged and lacks substantiation. More credible and in keeping with the sources, however, is the following linguistic development of the traditional Aramean self-designation.

Assyrian sources from the 12th century BC onward identify Aramean groups as Armāyā – a Semitic name that became their first self-designation. Due to inner-Aramaic developments, the plural ending changed from -āyā to -āyē and their name entered Edessan as Armāyē (singular Armāyā). It cannot be coincidence that this same term was still in common use as a self-ascription among early Aramean Christians such as Ephrem (†373) and Jacob of Serugh (†521).

Arameans later came to use a secondary sense of armāyē that can be translated as “gentiles, non-Jews” (armāyē is not capitalized, because it lost its original ethnic sense of “Arameans”). This new usage originated from the earliest NT translation in Edessan Aramaic, which was translated in whole or in part by Jewish Christians. Contemporary Jewish sources confirm their custom to divide humanity along religious lines into ‘Jews and non-Jews’, in the same way the Greeks typically divided the world culturally and linguistically into ‘Greeks and barbarians’. It is interesting to note that there are several cases where the sense of ‘non-Jews’ occurs in the NT (Acts 16:1 and Romans 3:9), which in the Aramaic translations of the Bible occur as armāyā (armāyē) “Aramean(s),” while the Greek versions and the modern Western translations based on them give hellēn(ες) “Greek(s).”

Furthermore, Aramaic-speaking Jews often used the religious term of armāyē also derogatively as “pagans, heathens.” It is significant to stress here that the Aramean Christians understood this secondary sense of their traditional self-ascription at first neutrally as ‘non-Jews’, if not positively as ‘gentiles’ (its positive connotation is mainly to be credited to Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles). Against this background, and bearing in mind that the Aramean Christians still continued to use Armāyē to express their ethno-linguistic identity, it is noteworthy that writers such as Ephrem employed the religious meaning of the NT-inspired armāyē in a positive way.
In Aramaic, bath-Armāyē (“the daughter of the Arameans”) and bar-Armāyē (“the son of the Arameans”) are at times used in reference to the Church and the Edessan King Abgar. The contexts in which they appear will reveal whether such Armāyē may be translated ethnically as “Arameans” or religiously as “gentiles.” It can even have both an ethnic and positive connotation, as in Aramean Christians.

Again, the reduction of the ethnic sense of Armāyē derives from Aramaic-speaking Jews, who also exported the meaning of “non-Jew, gentile” to Yemen and Ethiopia. However, the negative use of armāyē in Edessan Aramaic seems to date from after the sixth century. Yeshu Bar-Bahlul, an East Aramean lexicographer who lived in 10th-century Baghdad, provides one of the earliest examples of its occurrence. Referring to his earlier 10th-century colleague, Hnānisho’ Bar-Sarushway, he recorded under the term “Syria” that “the Syriacs [Ṣuryāye] were formerly called Arameans [Armāyē/Oromoye].” Under armāyē, however, he clarifies:

According to Bar-Sar[ushway, this term means] ‘pagan’ [hanpā/hanfo].

After armāyē eventually came to mean “pagans, heathens” among the Aramean Christians, the West Arameans interestingly changed their ancient self-designation to Ārāmāyē/Oromoye. Jacob of Edessa (†708) may have been the first who used, if not introduced, this adapted name in Edessan. Like the secondary sense of armāyē, this longer form similarly seems to be rooted in earlier Jewish Aramaic traditions. It is striking that this new form Ārāmāyē was not taken over by the East Arameans. Until today, some have preserved the ancient appellation Armāyē as a homonym: originally this name means “Arameans,” but sometimes also “gentile; pagan.”

The erudite and prolific writer Bar-Ebroyo (†1286) has left us two clear comments. One confirms the synonymous meaning of the names ‘Aramean’ and ‘Syriac’, while the other demonstrates the spelling and pronunciation of the self-designation of his people in its primary (Armāyē) and secondary (armāyē) meanings among the Arameans. A few quotations from his impressive works illustrate this fact:

You have not corrupted me in the foreign-speaking pagan astrology, but You have brought me to the [Gospel]-preaching Aramean-Syriac people [Ṣuryāyīthā Ārāmāyītā / Suryoyuto Oromooyo].

From Aram [Ārām/Orom], which is Syria [Ṣuryē], we say Ārāmāyē/Oromoyo (“Aramean”), with an A-vowel [O-vowel among West Arameans], R and M, which is Suryāyē/Suryoyo (“Syriac”). But again from Aram, which is the city of the pagans [hanpē/hanfe], [namely] the ancient Harran, [we also say] armāyē, with an A-vowel and a voiceless R, which is ‘pagan’ [hanpā/hanfo]. But the Easterners [madenhoye; East Arameans] do not know the first [pronunciation] and read in the [Second] Book of Kings [18:26]: “Speak with your servants in Aramaic [Armāyīth],” with an A-vowel and a voiceless R. It is clear that Scripture requires here Suryāyīth/Suryoyīth (“in Syriac”) and not hanpāyīth/hanfoyīth (“in a pagan way”). Also in Paul’s letter to the Galatians 2:14: “if you, who are a Jew, live in a pagan way [Armāyīth],” they
read it similarly with an A-vowel and a vowelless R. It is clear that Scripture requires here hanpāyah (“in a heathen manner”) and not Sūrāyāh (“in Syriac”). This is not the case with the Westerners [ma’erboy; West Arameans]. By the A-Γ/O-γ vowels which are pronounced, they distinguish ‘pagan’ [hanpā] from ‘Syriac’ [Sūrāyā; by using hanpā and Sūrāyā here, Bar-Ebroyo fascinatingly shows that the synonyms of these two terms are armoyo “pagan” and Oromoyo “Aramean,” respectively].

The Arameans [Ārāmāyē/Oromoyē] do not wish to be confounded [or: intermingled?] with the pagans [armāyē/armoyē].

In summary, the first known self-designation of “Arameans” (Armāyā > Armāyē) underwent the following semantic changes in the last three millennia:

1. Armāyā (“Aramean; Aramaic”): ethnic meaning, used as self-identification

2. This Armāyā developed into a homonym, acquiring a secondary sense which I render armāyā (“non-Jew, gentile” > “pagan, heathen”)

3. West Arameans made orthographic changes to keep their self-designation: Armāyā > Ārāmāyā (Oromoyo) “Aramean”

In any case, even after the conversion of the Arameans to Christianity and after their ancient self-designation had been neutralized and changed into a secondary, religious term, the West and East Sūrāyē continued to identify themselves and their language as “Aramean.” Moreover, until Europeans and Americans ‘rediscovered’ them in the 19th century, the Arameans had never claimed an eponymous ancestor for their people other than “Aram.”

Indeed, the interchangeability of the two names of ‘Aramean’ and ‘Syriac’ has always faithfully been retained by the Aramean (Syriac) church fathers. This fact has been recorded by the earlier cited 10th-century lexicographers and by the following authoritative dictionaries, which are often consulted by scholars today:

- The Aramaic-French/English/Arabic lexicon by L. Costaz equally explains Oromoyo as “araméen, syrien; aramean, syrian; arāmī, sūrī.”
- The leading Aramaic-Aramaic dictionary of T. Audo has under Oromoyo: “Arameans, i.e. Syriacs. The Aramaic language (is) Syriac.” In the preface, he furthermore argued that Arāmāyā/Oromoyo is the “genuine and original name” of the Aramean Christians (for more, see Ch. 11.1.1).

The essentially Greek term ‘Syrian’ (Surios/Suros)
Owing to their resemblance, the Greeks have always felt that the terms ‘Syria(n)” and ‘Assyria(n)” were onomastically related to each other. Both names, therefore,
would cause confusion among writers who did not take into account the synchronic-diachronic approach. This means that one has to study the sense of each name in the context of its first attestation and follow it through the subsequent eras. Such a study will reveal whether – and if indeed so, when, how and why – its root meaning has evolved, having acquired new connotations and meanings.\(^{160}\)

One further has to beware of the etymological fallacy, which incorrectly holds that the first sense of a word has essentially remained the same throughout later periods. It is crucial to recall the linguistic principle that an etymon, the basic form from which other words can develop, does not mean that all its later derivations have preserved the original root sense(s). Due to a variety of reasons, words and names can sometimes obtain new connotations and meanings in the course of their history.

In this regard, R. Rollinger proposes that the Greeks took the short form \textit{Sur}(i)os (“Syrian”) from a Luwian (\textit{Sura}/i) or related Indo-European milieu in Anatolia.\(^{161}\) It did not originate from Aramaic or another Semitic language, as can be seen for instance from Rollinger’s cited Phoenician text which has the long form \textit{Ashur}(im). When ‘Syria’ entered Greek and joined the longer form ‘Assyria’, both terms were understood and used interchangeably. However, Herodotus (\(\text{ca.} 425\) BC) decided to deviate from this Greek practice and began to disconnect the two names.\(^{162}\) This decision was probably the catalyst for the arbitrary and obscure use of these resembling names in the works of later writers throughout the centuries – from the ancient Greeks and Romans to some modern writers who continue this confusion.

Even if Herodotus marks the turning point in the history of the separate paths of these two names, his \textit{Histories VII.63} can sometimes confuse matters more: “these are called ‘Syrians’ by the Greeks, but ‘Assyrians’ by the barbarians.” P. Helm explains why this statement cannot be invoked to claim the synonymy of ‘Syria(n)’ and ‘Assyria(n)’ \textit{after} the fifth century BC.\(^{163}\) Later attestations of ‘Assyria(n)’, which can be loosely equated to ‘Syria(n)’, do not always refer to ‘Assyrians’, especially since Herodotus’ differentiation of these similarly looking terms was “lost upon later Classical authors, some of whom interpreted \textit{Histories VII.63} as a mandate to refer to Phoenicians, Jews, and any other Levantines as ‘Assyrians’.”\(^{164}\) In other words, some post-Herodotean Greek sources indiscriminately designated Arameans, Phoenicians, Jews and others as both ‘Assyrians’ and ‘Syrians’.

The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, some time in the third century BC), Strabo (\(\text{ca.} 64\) BC–24 AD), Josephus (37–some time after 100 AD) and early Christian works all bear witness to the fact that the Greek-speaking world began to restrict the name ‘Syria(n)’ to ‘Aram(ean)’ from about the third century BC on – wherever the Arameans were to be found, as T. Nöldeke stressed, whether in Syria proper or as far east as Babylonia.\(^{165}\) In fact, the Greek language simply has never had an established name for ‘Aramean; Aramaic’ other than \textit{Sur}(i)os.
Aramaic Sūryāyā/Suryoyo, šuroy/oš-šuroye and Arabic aS-Siryān

[S]ince approximately the final decade of the fourth, certainly around the early fifth century A.D., the Aramean Christians had invented the term Suryoyo. Constructed upon the toponym Suriya (“Syria”), which is Greek in form and which had existed at least since the second century A.D. in Edessan Aramaic, Sūryāyā may be conceived of as the Aramaicized version of the Greek Surios.\(^{166}\)

The name Sūryāyā in Aramaic: three influential theories

In spite of the confusion between the terms ‘Syrian’ and ‘Assyria’ among post-Herodotean Greeks and Romans, there was no such misunderstanding among the Aramean Christians. It never crossed their mind that the name of their people was, somehow and at some point in time, related to that of the ancient Assyrians. In Aramaic, these two names were wholly different in writing, reading and meaning. Indeed, there has always been a clear distinction between the terms Sūryāyā/Sūryāyē (“Syria/Syrians”) and Āthūr/Āthūrāyē (“Assyria/Assyrians”).

In view of the growing awareness of an ‘Assyrian’ identity among the ‘Nestorians’ and the widespread theory in the 19th century that Greek ‘Syria’ derived from ‘Assyria’, the notion emerged among their elites who were familiar with this theory that in Aramaic these names were also historically linked. However, this latter idea has no basis in historical fact. The origin of the word Sūryāyā/Suryoyo (“Syrian”) is often explained by one of these three fanciful and undocumented theories.\(^{167}\)

1. The effort to derive this term from Āthūrāyē/Othuroyō looks like this: Āthūrāyē > Āsūrāyā (sound shift from th to s) > (')sūrāyā (apphaeresis, i.e. the beginning of the word is dropped) > Sūrāyā > Sūryāyā (inclusion of y). This was clearly not an inner-Aramaic development and the artificial name (')sūrāyē (As)syrians” was introduced only in 1897 by an East Aramean, according to W. Heinrichs. He adds that this supposed semantic change of Sūryāyā “did not evolve in Syriac.”\(^{168}\) “This simple philological equation is doubtful,” wrote R. Macuch, clarifying that “the whole history of the people [had] to be assyrianized,” even their traditional self-designation. One creative way to achieve this goal was to render Sūrāyē (“Syriac”) “in reprints with an initial aleph, though provided with a linea occultans, as (')sūrāyē, in order to bring it graphically closer to ātōrāyē (“Assyrian”).”\(^{169}\)

2. S. Parpola argues that the Aramaic self-identification Sūryāyā has evolved from Ashūrāyū, the Akkadian self-appellation of the ancient Assyrians. Thus, he argues that Sūrāyē are Assyrians – even if they themselves may not have fully understood or been aware of their own history and identity. However creative this theory may be, it relies on the 19th-century invented
form (ṣūrāyē. Moreover, it lacks and even ignores evidence, it involves serious difficulties and it runs counter to linguistic and historical facts.\textsuperscript{170}

3. East and West Aramean chroniclers and lexicographers sought to explain that there was an Aramean king Cyrus (Ṣūros in Aramaic; note the Greek ending -\textit{os}) in Antiquity. According to this legend, which has its origin in Greek mythology, “Syria” and “the Sūryāyē [who] were formerly known as Arameans” were named after this legendary figure.\textsuperscript{171} In the last century, a strange version of this legend emerged that only added to the confusion about the origin and meaning of Sūryāyā. This unconvincing theory states, in a nutshell, that the converted Arameans named themselves Sūryāyē after the Persian king Cyrus, who reigned from 559 to 529 BC and who is mentioned in the Bible (e.g., Chronicles 36:22ff. & Ezra 1:1).\textsuperscript{172} However, Sūros (an exception is Qūros by Michael the Elder) of the Edessan texts is spelled as Kūresh (Koresh) in the Aramaic (and Hebrew) Bible. Moreover, the early church fathers placed the mythical Sūros in the time of Moses, many centuries before the Persian king Cyrus in the sixth century BC.

\textit{Sūryāyā, the Aramaicization of the Greek Sur(ī)os}

Anyone familiar with the history of Mesopotamia, especially with the growing influence of the Greeks on this region and its peoples, can imagine how the name Sūryāyā may be explained and understood against the backdrop of the increasing Grecization (Hellenization) of the Aramaic-speaking populations in Edessa and its surroundings. As a result of this assimilation process, indigenous peoples, places, rivers and cults were named, if not renamed, after the Greek fashion and without regard for their long-established native names. Keen to record this specific aspect of Grecization, the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus observed:

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. \textit{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, \textit{embellishing the nations with names which they could understand} and imposing on them forms of government, as though they were descended from themselves.\textsuperscript{173}

Regarding their self-identification, the Arameans were capable of withstanding this form of Grecization until the fourth century AD. Posidionius (\textit{ca.} 135 – 51 BC), the Greek historian, geographer and astronomer from Apamea in Syria, attested to this in the following remark about his fellow citizens and their self-identification: “[T]he people we call Syrians were called by the Syrians themselves Arameans.” In 93/94 AD, the Greek-writing Jewish historian Josephus would similarly clarify:

Aram ruled the Arameans, whom the Greeks term Syrians.\textsuperscript{174}
Ultimately, Aramean Christians belonging to the translation movement in Edessa would invent the term ʿSūryāyā between 390 and 420 AD. They already had experience in translating works from Greek into Aramaic and had carried out free translations in which the Greek term ʿSurios/Suros ("Syrian; Syriac") was translated as ʿArmaŷā ("Aramean; Aramaic"). Later, however, their translations became more literal and that is when the newly coined term ʿSūryāyā emerges as a mirror translation, in fact as the Aramaicized rendition, of the Greek term ʿSurios/Suros.

Ephrem himself was not acquainted with the term ʿSūryāyā. He only knew and used ʿArmaŷā as the traditional self-identification of his people and mother tongue. After his passing, however, the bilingual translators from Edessa knew well that the Greeks had designated the Arameans and their Aramaic language by the Greek name of ʿSurioi/Suroi ("Syrians"), in the same way that foreign nations speak of the Germans/Allemands in reference to those who call themselves in their own language Deutsche.

Appreciation of Greek thinking, expression and learning among the Aramean Christian intellectuals from Edessa grew rapidly since the early fifth century. Their translation activities increased and the Greek language would have a major impact on Aramaic in the following centuries. According to S. Brock, the development of the mainly linguistic Hellenization of the Aramaic dialect of Edessa and Aramean Christian history in Mesopotamia can be outlined as follows:

- The fourth century was quintessentially un-Hellenized;
- The fifth and sixth centuries show a quickly developing transition period;
- In the seventh century, this process of Grecization would reach its peak.176

Brock has also demonstrated that the "transition from free to an exceedingly literal technique of translation can be seen readily by comparing the Old Syriac [including the Sinaitic version, from the late second to early fourth century], Peshitta [New Testament; this is a revision of the Old Syriac Gospels that was completed in the early fifth century], Philoxenian (as far as this can be reconstructed) and the Harelean gospels [a revision that was finished in 616]."177

Let us apply this method and look closer at the translation technique from free to very literal. If we examine chronologically how the Greek name ʿSturos was rendered by the translators of the first Edessan Aramaic translations in Luke 4:27, for instance, it yields this fascinating change of the name ʿArmaŷā to ʿSūryāyā:

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<tr>
<th>Sinaitic:</th>
<th>Armāyā</th>
<th>the Aramean</th>
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<tr>
<td>Peshitta:</td>
<td>Naʾmon Armāyā</td>
<td>Naaman the Aramean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harklean:</td>
<td>Naʾmon haw ʿSūryāyā</td>
<td>Naaman the Syrian</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The Greek language has no name for the Aramean people and their language except for ‘Syrian’. Conversely, Aramaic at first did not have a one-to-one translation for the Greek term ‘Syrian’ in the Greek-Aramaic translations other than Armāyā. However, once the term Sūrāyā was coined and integrated into Edessan, it coexisted for a while with the original self-ascription Armāyā. Subsequently, there emerged a transition period between 420 and 500. After the new name gained in prestige, the traditional self-identification became outmoded and finally fell into abeyance. However, even in the following centuries one notices a continued self-awareness among the East and West Arameans who occasionally kept identifying themselves and their language as “Aramean; Aramaic” well into modern times.

Two mechanisms in particular led to the wide circulation of the new self-designation Sūrāyā/Suryoyo, namely the Hellenizing Aramean churches and the high-status literary Aramaic dialect of Edessa. They can be described as follows:

1. D. O’Leary’s depiction of the church as “a missionary of Greek intellectual culture as well as of the Christian religion,” aptly reflects the Aramean church between the late fourth and seventh centuries. It was the church as “a Hellenizing force,” he argued, “more than anything else which brought about the Hellenization of” Mesopotamia.179

2. As soon as the new self-identification Sūrāyā was naturalized in Edessan, it followed this prestigious literary dialect which impacted the Aramaic vernaculars and the Aramean missionaries who traveled everywhere in and beyond the Middle East. Among the things they had learned in Edessa and which they had promoted was also this new and appealing self-ascription of the Aramean Christians and their language, Sūrāyā, which symbolized what would increasingly become their Christianized Aramean identity.

Modern Aramaic Sūr(y)āyā, Suryoyo, şūroyo and aṣ-şūroyo

Some dialects of the East Arameans have retained the traditional self-reference Sūrāyā. In many other East Aramaic speech forms, however, it evolved into Sūrāyā, as a result of haplology, i.e. the elimination of the first syllable when two successive similar syllables occur.180 Both the original and shortened version of the term often denote the ethnic name “Syriaes,” although Sūrāye “in many varieties of [Northeastern] Modern Aramaic is more or less a synonym of Christians.”181

In the Aramaic dialect of Ṭur-Abdin (see below), there is a slight distinction in the pronunciation between the speech of its capital Midyat (siroyo) and its surrounding villages (šuroyo); sūroyo/siroyo (with a regular s) does not exist in this vernacular. A. Tezel explains how certain words in Ṭur-Abdin Aramaic have altered the regularly pronounced š (this letter is called sēmkāth in Edessan) to an emphatic ʃ (called şode in Edessan Aramaic). This sound change, which features in Christian Arabic as well, “is of frequent occurrence in words containing the sound r.”182
After haplography took place (Sūrōyo > Sūroyo), it is clear how šūroyo/siroyo could have appeared. The same can be said about the way many of the elderly speakers still call Ṭur-Abdin Aramaic, namely Ṣūrayt ("Syriac; in Syriac"), whereas the East Arameans call their dialects Sūreth or Sūre. For both forms, one can imagine, with Tezel, the evolution of *Sūrayāith in the NENA dialects and *Sūroiyith in Ṭur-Abdin Aramaic > *Sūrāyāith and *Sūroyith > Sūreth/Sūre and Šūrayt:

The form Šūrayt is probably a contraction of either sūryā’t (actual reading with the West Syrians sūryōyāš), that is, “in Syriac, Syriac,” or *šūrā’t > šūrāyāt, that is, “in Christian Syriac,” an adverbial formation from šūrōya, “Christian Syrian” (then any Christian), of which itself is to be connected with sūrōyā and sūryō which is met with already in [Edessan Aramaic in which these forms are, in fact, rare and] unusual spellings of sūryōyā.¹⁸³

As early as the 19th century, if not before, the ethnic sense of Sūrōyo was neutralized in Ṭur-Abdin Aramaic and šūroyo/siroyo had acquired the religious meaning of “Christian” (hence I do not capitalize sūroyo). It can be applied to any Christian, irrespective of the ethnic background of the referenced person or group. Its first documented occurrence was in 1881, when E. Prym and A. Socin observed: “as a race [i.e. ethnically] they call themselves Surjēje…as Christians Surjēje.”¹⁸⁴

The derivations of the form Sūrāyā/Sūroyo acquired this religious connotation, or meaning in some dialects, because virtually all Sūrāyē/Sūryoye were Christians. Besides, since they lived in a growing Muslim environment they came to identify themselves against the ‘other’; hence the worldview of Aramean Christians consisted essentially of ‘Christians and Muslims’. This linguistic development can be compared with present-day terms such as Arabs and Turks. These names are often understood and used by outsiders as (synonyms of) “Muslims” by virtue of the fact that nearly all Arabs and Turks are Muslims.

One can also often hear the word as-šūroye in Ṭur-Abdin Aramaic, which marks the plural form of šūroyo (“Christian”). After the use of the initial a-vowel, the first consonant is doubled (see Ch. 5.1). Thus, as-šūroye simply means “the Christians,” whereas as-Sūroyo means “the Syriacs.” Such plural forms have nothing to do with any of the Aramaic variants of the term ‘Assyrians’: Ashūroye, Athūroye or Asūroye (the rare Edessan Aramaic rendition of the Greek term). Similar cases of haplography and semantic changes in Edessen and Ṭur-Abdin Aramaic include the following three illustrations:

1) A clear example in the dialect of Edessa is Ūrhāyā (“Edessan”), which derives from ’Ūrhāy + -āyā (this suffix marks adjectives derived from substantives and indicates belonging to a group or place/country). Because of haplography, the linguistically expected term *’Ūrhāyāyā eventually became the known and established form ’Ūrhāyā.
2) In Ṭur-Abdin Aramaic, hiyutho ("identity") and Suryutho ("Syriac people") are widely used today. Such forms are also the result of haplogy, as they have their origin in the more than 1,000-year-old Edessan Aramaic words hīyāyūthā (hiyoyutho) and Suryāyūthā (Suryoyutho).

3) The semantic change of some terms from an ethnic to a religious meaning, as in the case of sūrāyāṣuroyo (from Sūrāyā/Suryoyo), where haplogy is at work, is not unique. For instance, the Edessan Aramaic name Tayyāyā (Ṭayoyo; "Tayite; member of the Arab tribe of Tay") became in Ṭur-Abdin Aramaic ṭayo ("Muslim"). In this modern Aramaic dialect, ṭayo can be applied to any Muslim, irrespective of one's ethno-linguistic background. So, too, can any Christian group of people be called (aṣ-)ṣūroye/(aṣ-)ṣiroye "(the) Christians," while the original and ethnic name (aS-)Suryoye "(the) Syriacs" can only be used for the Aramean (Syriac) Christians.

**Arabic aS-Siryan**

The Arabic form assiryanī ("the Syrian") or assiryan ("the Syriacs") has given rise to the erroneous association with the name ‘Assyrian’, which in Arabic is Ashuri or Athuri. However, the form can be transliterated as al-Siryan. Students of Arabic will recognize that the element al stands here for the definite article “the” and that the letter lam (l) belongs to the so-called 14 sun letters, which also include s and sh. Such letters disappear after al-, as they are assimilated to the next consonant and doubled. For instance, al-shams ("the sun") becomes pronounced as ash-shams.

The Arabic aS-Siryani entered the Turkish language in which it became ‘Süryanı’ (singular) and ‘Sûryanıler’ (plural). Sometimes it is held that the Swedish artificial term ‘Syrian’ (Suryoyo; plural ‘Syrianer’), which was introduced in the 1980s to distinguish it from ‘Syrier’ (a citizen of Syria; the plural is also ‘Syrier’), has its origin in Turkish ‘Süryanı’. The Swedish name ‘Syrian’, including adjectives like ‘Syrianska’, was rather inspired by the English term ‘Syrian’. At the universities, however, only the long-established name ‘syriska’ ("Syriac") is used.
Chapter 8. The Semitic name ‘Armean’ and the Greek term ‘Syrian’

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150 The former Syriac Orthodox Patriarch (†2014), H.H. Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch At A Glance (2008; 19831), p. 25.

151 See my forthcoming study on the use of the term Armāyē in St. Ephrem (†373), which forms the basis of the summary in this chapter. It contains copious references to primary and secondary sources and basically argues that Ephrem was not familiar with the term Ṣuryāyā, neither as a self-ascription nor as the name employed for his spoken and written language. Interestingly, he only knew Armāyē as the identification of the group of people he belonged to and called his language Ṣuryāyā.

The study of Ephrem, just as much as other early Aramean writers who are cited, questions the following two findings by B. ter Haar Romeny, the director of the Leiden Pionier Group, and the scholars who studied the post-451 AD era: “If our interpretation is correct, the identification Aram, which became very important to the West Syrians, can first be found in Jacob of Edessa’s exegesis” and “Syriac-speaking Miaphysites had no proper name expressing the identity of the community.” See B. ter Haar Romeny with Naures Atto, Jan J. van Ginkel, Mat Immerzeel, and Bas Snelders, “The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project,” in Church History and Religious Culture 89 (2009), pp. 16 and 44. He already shared his convictions in “From Religious Association to Ethnic Community: A Research Project on Identity Formation among the Syrian Orthodox under Muslim Rule,” in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations 16:4 (October, 2005a), p. 379: “It was just before the rise of Islam in the seventh century that the first outlines of a communal identity appeared” and before this period the (West) ‘Syriacs’ did not seem to exist, since they “had no proper name expressing the identity of the community; there was no myth of common ancestry; they could not claim shared historical memories exclusively for themselves; there were no clear territorial borders; and the elements of common culture were not exclusive to them.” See also his “Ethnicity, Ethnogenesis and the Identity of Syriac Orthodox Christians,” in W. Pohl and others (eds.), Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 360–1100 (Ashgate, 2012), pp. 183–204. Respectfully, I disagree
with these conclusions in view of Ephrem and other early sources that have not been taken into account and call for further research into the genesis and formation of the ‘Syriac’ identity.

135 Ibid., pp. 21f. Bar-Ebroyo has more interesting statements on his historical, ethnic, geographical and linguistic Aramean (Syriac) identity, just like his predecessor, Bar-Salibi (†1171; n. 227, below). For some reason, H. Teule, “Reflections on Identity. The Syriacs of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Bar Salibi, Bar Shakko, and Barhebraeus,” in Church History and Religious Culture 89 (2009), pp. 179-189, chooses to remain silent on the Aramean self-identification of at least two of his three highlighted authors of the Syriyatho Oromoyo, to use Bar-Ebroyo’s expression. In “Who are the Syriacs?,” in P.H. Omtzigt and others (eds.), The Slow Disappearance of the Syriacs from Turkey And of the Grounds of the Mor Gabriel Monastery (Berlin, 2012), pp. 47-56, Teule again missed the opportunity to illuminate his readers on how the ‘Syriacs’ perceived and designated themselves.

D. Weltecke, “Bar ‘Ebroyo on Identity: Remarks on his Historical Writing,” in Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies 19:2 (2016), pp. 303-332, wonders why Bar-Ebroyo rarely uses the term ‘Aramean’. Centuries before Bar-Ebroyo (†1286), the Syrians had already begun to call themselves and their language by the Greek-inspired term ‘Syrian’ (see Ch. 8 and 9.2). His common use of the name Suryāyā with respect to his people and language has nothing to do with his supposed intention to employ “a neutral and inclusive language” for his audience, as Weltecke assumes (p. 324); it was simply their typical native self-designation. The fact that Bar-Ebroyo preferred to use the general term ‘Syrians’ instead of ‘Arameans’ or that he did not choose to juxtapose both names in the particular case of specifying the sons of Sen as “Assyrians, Chaldeans, Lydians, Syrians” (p. 312), is no cogent argument for his “disinterest in the term ‘Arameans’” (p. 315). Rather, it demonstrates that – just like his intellectual predecessors with whose works he was well acquainted – Bar-Ebroyo obviously understood and used ‘Syrians’ as a synonym of the name ‘Arameans’ in this and other cases where he explicitly shows their interchangeable meaning (compare, e.g., the cited quotes in notes 154-156).


Last year (p. 240 n. 5), he explained: “By the early imperial period, Greeks and Romans often used the terms Syriac or Assyrian (which they often conflated) to describe the people who called themselves ‘Aramaean’ in their own language (Aramaic).”Already in 2010-2011 (p. 32 n. 15) he argued this, while adding about the post-Greek and Islamic period: “As Greek speech disappeared and the imperial borders of Rome and Persia disintegrated, the definition of a ‘Syrian’ as a Greek or Syriac speaker within the Roman Syrian provinces became obsolete. Instead, Syrians and Arameans were according to the broadest definitions the Syriac- or Aramaic-speaking Christians under Islamic rule” (pp. 25f). However, Andrade also believes that Syriac-speaking authors from places like Adiabene in North Iraq “were descended from Assyrians of antiquity who had inhabited the region”
(2014: p. 299). This is contrary to what his cited scholars (Adam Beck and Richard Payne; p. 299 n. 1) explain in their studies. According to them and other experts, claims of noble lineage such as the identification with the ancient Assyrian (or Pishdadian, Kayanian and Parthian) kings and people in certain Edessan Aramaic texts from North Iraq are a familiar literary motif and the knowledge of an Assyrian past simply came from the Bible and Aramaic translations of Greek texts. We also find little support for Andrade’s understanding of the expressions used in Greek by Lucian of Samosata († after 180 AD; “I who write am an Assyrian”) and Tatian who wrote from Rome in the second century AD (“I was born in the land of the Assyrians”). Because Lucian and Tatian mix up the names ‘Syria(n)’ and ‘Assyria(n)’ in their writings, most scholars do not regard these two statements as evidence of a specific ‘Assyrian’ self-identification.

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. In this eight-century BC inscription, the short form Sura/i in the Indo-European Luvian text appears in juxtaposition with the long form Ashur(im) in the Semitic Phoenician part to denote “Assyria(ns).” This confirms that the short form, perhaps truncated in view of a similar Luvian inscription which has the longer form Asur/ı, does not (as Rollinger suggests) originate from a Semitic language; for more, see my article cited in the previous note. Moreover, it merely demonstrates that if the Greeks had borrowed this short form for ‘Assyria(ns)’ from the Luvian or a related language, the synonymous practice of the two terms ‘Assyria(ns)’ and ‘Syria(ns)’ simply continued consistently in the Greek language until the time of Herodotus who changed this.


Ibid., pp. 287 and 294-305. So also, for instance, O. Leuze, Die Satrapieneinteilung in Syrien und im Zweistromlande von 520 – 320 (Halle [Saale]: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1935), pp. 278 and 293.


Chapter 9. Aramaic Sûrîyâ/Suryoyo, suroyo/as-suroye and Arabic aS-Sîrîyân

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This chapter is also mainly based on Messo (forthcoming) and, op. cit. (n. 160; 2011), pp. 111-125. See further Ch. 11.1.1, below.

W. Heinrichs, “The modern Assyrians – Name and Nation,” in R. Contini and others (eds.), Semitica: Serta Philologica Constantino Tsereteli dicata (Torino, 1993), pp. 102 and 103. See the article by Mirza Masun Khan Karam (1862-1943), Malkûtâ d-`Atorâyê yán d-`sûrâyê men haqiyat qaddîshâtâ w-`antikê d-`Nîwê (“The Kingdom of the Assyrians or the Assyrians according to Biblical history and the antiquities of Niniveh”) in the periodical Zahriré d-Bahrâ 48:6, 35a-b (1897). See also Macuch, op. cit. (n. 70; 1976), pp. 142 and 214f. See also Ch 11.1.1.


in n. 160, pp. 115f., and Ch. 12.3, below. Messo (forthcoming) provides a more extensive discussion of Parpola’s unconvincing theory on the origin of the term *Suruyoy*. 

171 Cf. D. Dag, *Did king Suros really exist?* (undated, but 2012; see http://www.haramaic-dem.org/English/david%20dag/did-king-suros-really-exist.pdf; last accessed 25 April 2016), pp. 1-10. Although the translations of the cited Aramaic texts are not perfect and more could have been written on this topic, the author nevertheless quotes the most important manuscripts.

172 This theory was promoted, if not invented, by H.H. the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Yacoub III (†1980) in his Arabic book *History of the Syrian Church of Antioch* (Beirut, 1953), as mentioned by Dag (see n. 171, above). The theory received prominence after his lecture at Göttingen University on 8 October 1971, published as *The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch* (Damascus, 19742), p. 6.


175 Consider that Ephrem’s unfamiliarity with this Aramaicized Greek term is in agreement with his “comparatively unhellenized” language and vocabulary. Cf. S.P. Brock, “Greek Words in Ephrem and Narsais: A Comparative Sampling,” in *ARAM* 11-12 (1999-2000), pp. 439-449 (here p. 449 n. 45). See, most recently, also Y. Monnickendam, “How Greek is Ephrem’s Syriac? Ephrem’s Commentary on Genesis as a Case Study,” in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23:2 (2015), pp. 213-244, who tentatively concludes that Ephrem did not know Greek or was at least insufficiently familiar with it.


178 G.A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaitic, Curetonianum, Peshitta and Harkleian Versions*, Vol. III. Luke (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p. 71. Notice how Naaman, the Aramean “commander-in-chief of the army of the King of Aram” (2 Kings 5:1, 20), is translated from the Hebrew source text into the Greek text of the Gospel as “Naaman the Syrian [Suros].” Note that since ‘Aram(ean)’ and ‘Edom(i)te’ are written similarly in Hebrew and Aramaic, the translators of the Aramaic Peshitta Old testament have changed ‘Aram(ean)’ to ‘Edom(i)te’ in a number of cases, including the case of Naaman “the Aramean,” whom the Peshitta OT regards as “the Edomite.”


181 A. Mengozzi, “Suraye wa-Phrangaye: Late East-Syriac Poetry on Historical Events in Classical Syriac and Surahe,” in *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 22:1 (2008), p. 9; he also refers to a text from the late 19th century. Cf. A.J. Maclean, *A Dictionary of the Dialects of Vernacular Syriac: As Spoken by the Eastern Syrians of Kurdistan, North-West Persia, and the Plain of Mosul: With Illustrations from the Dialects of the Jews of Zakhu and Azerbaijan, and of the Western Syrians of Tur Abdin and Malula* (Oxford, 1901), p. 223: “ sûra רי more commonly sûrâ-yá... OS [Old Syriac], Syriac. This is the ordinary name by which the E[ast] Syrians call themselves, though they also apply it to the W[est] Syrians or Jacobites [i.e. Syriac Orthodox],” The Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholics from the Nineveh Plain in North Iraq, however, use similar pronunciations as the Chaldeans and ‘Nestorians’ in their modern Aramaic vernacular. They also call themselves *Suruyèye*.

182 A. Tesez, op. cit. (n. 78; 2011), p. 108. Cf. also pp. 72, 109 and 182 (5.2.33).

183 Ibid., p. 24 n. 13.