

# International Syriac Language Project (ISLP)

**609-40/1**

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## **Syriac Lexicography between Information Science and Linguistics**

Previous research based on the ColibriCore algorithm has allowed us to trace translation patterns between Hebrew Bible and the Peshitta, based on n-gram analysis. For every lexeme, we derived an index of the entire distribution of collocations for both languages. In this paper, we investigate how these patterns, based merely on surface forms, reflect deeper syntactic differences. In order to do that, we discern the twenty largest translation divergences between lexical n-grams, and investigate what syntactic patterns they reflect. This will allow us to determine these lexical divergences in terms of syntactic features such as valency on the one hand, but information theoretic notions such as entropy on the other in order to classify and explain the structures with highest divergence. After this concrete case study, we provide further insights into the possibilities and limits of comparing syntactic and information theoretic metrics for the lexicology of Syriac in particular, and ancient resources in general. Furthermore, we place this discussion in the recent resurgence of information theory in the field of linguistics.

**609-40/2**

*Michael Sokoloff (Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel)*

## **New Developments in Christian Palestinian Aramaic**

Since the publication of the speaker's *Dictionary of Christian Palestinian Aramaic* in 2014, there has been continued progress in the publication of new texts from the Old Period, some of which have now added new vocabulary to this First Millennium Aramaic dialect. The sources of the new texts come from: (1) new inscriptions on hard material, such as metals and mosaics; (2) republication of texts from St. Catherine's Monastery on the basis of new photographic techniques; (3) discovery of new palimpsests originating with

lower writing in CPA from the Cairo Geniza. The talk will survey the new finds and will deal with the new vocabulary items which have been found in them.

609-40/3

*James C. Wolfe (Princeton University),*

*Fatima Zohra Boumhaout (Princeton University)*

### **Syriac Terms for Roman Institutions:**

#### **An Exercise in Syriac Lexicography and the Digital Humanities**

Although we know that the Syriac language underwent significant lexical and syntactic changes due to contact with Greek in Roman imperial contexts (Butts 2016), there has yet to be a systematic analysis of the ways in which Syriac writers rendered *termini technici* of Roman law and the Roman imperial administration into Syriac. Similar studies on the evolution of post-classical Greek have proven vital to the study of the Roman state in late antiquity and Byzantium (Magie 1905, Mason 1974). There is no such study of Syriac terms for Roman institutions.

Despite the robust tradition of providing Greek and Latin glosses in Syriac lexica (Ferrari 1622, Brockelmann 1895, R. Payne Smith 1901, Köbert 1956, Sokoloff 2009) and the significant amount of scholarship on Syriac translations of Greek texts, few of these resources are readily accessible to non-specialists and many require knowledge of Greek or Latin. Our current project, Syriac Terms for Roman Institutions (STRI), will be an online searchable database of Syriac lexemes for non-specialists, collating pertinent lexical data from Syriac texts and the major Syriac lexica into one open access repository. Of particular interest are calques, idioms, and multiword lexemes that are not discussed in the lexica due to the conventions and restrictions of Syriac lexicography on the printed page.

With the support of a Seed Grant from the Center for Digital Humanities at Princeton University, a limited corpus prototype as a proof of concept will go live in June 2022. In this paper, in addition to outlining the in-scope goals of the prototype, we present our methods and some preliminary findings. We also discuss the future of the project and a roadmap for future collaboration with other projects in Syriac lexicography and the Digital Humanities.

609-40/4

*Jerome Lund (Independent Scholar, Norway)*

#### **Peshitta Deuteronomy as a Reader-oriented Translation**

In the introduction to her translation of the Peshitta of Deuteronomy, Carmel McCarthy uses the poorly chosen rubric “Mistranslation” to group together a number of disparate readings found in the Peshitta. She indeed

recognizes this in part, but uses the term anyway. For her, the category “mistranslation” includes what she describes as “renderings where the differences between the Hebrew and the Syriac may be the result of errors, misreadings, mistranslations or approximations on the translator’s part.” She adds to this category some translations where the Peshitta “gives a free or non-literal rendering,” which translations, she confesses, might better fit under the heading “Interpretation” (her Addendum 7). I would like to reconsider a number of her examples and show that they are not mistranslations, but instead point to a reader-oriented translation rooted in the language and exegesis of the second century.

609-40/5

*Logan Copley (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam)*

### **The Peshitta’s Rendering of the *Numeruswechsel* in Deuteronomy**

The Hebrew version of Deuteronomy preserved in the Masoretic Text contains many shifts between second person singular and plural. This shift occurs in verbs, suffixes, and personal pronouns. There are many competing theories on the origin of this phenomenon, however, there has been little study devoted to the ancient translators’ understanding of these shifts. In particular, no one has investigated how the translator of the Peshitta version of Deuteronomy translated these shifts.

This paper will explore the various translation techniques the translator employed to make sense of these shifts. Particular attention will be given to instances where the Peshitta version disagrees with the Masoretic Text and instances where the Peshitta agrees with the Septuagint version against the Masoretic Text. Using data compiled for the author’s dissertation, the investigation can look beyond granular, word-level detail to examine if the translator translated according to the number found his Hebrew *Vorlage* in certain linguistic contexts and not others. For example, does the translation differ in certain clause types or if the suffix is part of an object rather than the subject? This study will also explore whether certain lexemes are translated with a different number than their Hebrew counterparts at a higher frequency than other lexemes.

The goal of the paper is to provide an explanation of only one aspect of the translator’s technique and to provide a framework for investigating other examples of number switching that occur in Syriac translations of the Hebrew Bible.

*Amir Vasheghanifarahani (University of Tartu, Estonia)*

### Poetology of the Peshitta Psalm 146: A Poetical Example of Translation

The Psalter has been transmitted to us not in its original form but through a variety of manuscripts (Mss) that appear to have been written by the last scribes who brought it to a conclusion. Thus, the Peshitta can be taken as a reliable witness to an Old Testament Hebrew manuscript prior to the Masoretic Text. In light of Peshitta's edition and study, it is evident that the Hebrew model / *Vorlage* followed nearly the same principles as the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible. There is even evidence of a vocalization of the Hebrew text that stands very close to the ancient Masoretic recording made many centuries later. In the present study, which is based upon the Leiden edition of P and the *BHS* edition of MT, we would like to concentrate our attention upon Psalm 146, which displays a number of similarities and differences between the MT and P versions as far as poetology is concerned.

*David J. A. Clines (University of Sheffield)*

### Defining Definitions: A Lexicographical Taxonomy

In the last decades it has become quite fashionable in lexicographical circles to extol the merits of "definitions" in dictionaries, especially over against "glosses". But little attention has been given to the fundamental question of what a definition is, or can be. This paper sets out to define "definition" and to analyse the kinds of definitions a lexicon (especially of the ancient Hebrew language) might employ. The taxonomy developed here will, it is hoped, be of significance to lexicographers generally and especially to those working with ancient languages.

I will begin by distinguishing between definition and gloss. A *gloss* is a brief, usually one-word, statement of the meaning of a word. A *definition* is a longer statement of meaning, focusing on the nature or essence of the thing to be defined (that is, of the *definiendum*), showing what the word's senses may be. I argue that a gloss should not be conceived of as an opposite to a definition, but as a type of definition.

Definitions are generally categorized as "intensional" definitions, which state the necessary and sufficient features shared by all the items of a given term, and "extensional" definitions, which state the items that a term describes. But I would add in the case of a poorly attested language (like Classical Hebrew) two further distinctions, namely between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" definitions. An intrinsic definition states the meaning of the term using the evidence available from the texts surviving in the language. Such

definitions, though evidence-based, can frequently be misleading because of the narrowness of their base. An extrinsic definition consists of data about the term that are derived from outside the textual evidence in the given language. In the case of the Hebrew lexicon, examples of extrinsic definitions include the year dates of persons or the modern location of places or the scientific names of plants and animals.

My paper will also introduce other types of definition, such as encyclopaedic, negational, attestational and exegetical, and give examples of all the types of definition surveyed.

**611-40/2**

*Mats Eskhult (University of Uppsala, Sweden)*  
**Time and Tense in Biblical Hebrew Narration,  
Description, Admonition, and Prediction**

Metaphors that are connected to the notion of time constitute a coherent system in the conceptualization of human experience. Man exists in time and speaks of situations located in time by means of tenses. Cross linguistically, some metaphors depict time as moving towards man, others depict it as stationary and man as moving through it.

In Biblical Hebrew and cognate Semitic languages the past is expressed as something that lies “in front” of man, while the future is located “behind”. Instead of man facing time, time is so to speak catching up from behind; and when it goes by, the past is visible in front of man, while the future being behind remains unseen.

The biblical author, when translating this inner “landscape” into the linguistic categories of narration, had to chisel out the contrast between foreground and background and the distinction between telling the stream of events and showing ongoing activity.

Dialogue, referring to what is actual and present at the point of speech, makes little use of these distinctions. Catchwords in biblical discourse are to a great extent hortatory, and consequently modal in character involving expressions of wish, obligation, permission, liability, and eventuality.

However, all statements referring to the future are not modal. They are often predictive and thus real rather than potential – an observation that might explain why Biblical Hebrew predictive discourse employs the essentially non-modal *wegatal* as its leading form.

611-40/3

*Carolyn Alsen (University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia)***Some Linguistic and Social Observations on Two Syriac Inscriptions from St Paul's Monastery**

At the monastery of St Paul, on the Red Sea, two Garshuni inscriptions in West Syriac, one diglot with Arabic, are seen at the conclusion of Arabic hagiographical volumes (Hist. 68 and 70). These inscriptions are selected in this paper for two reasons. One purpose is the provenance and date of the inscriptions, in the eighteenth-century Coptic resurgence, which occasioned the production of liturgy, manuscripts and other cultural practices in Cairene Coptic communities. These texts may be related to the important role of the larger *arakhina* scribal system and the *Archons* in the reestablishment of the previously destroyed monastery, after periods of power vacuums in Ottoman Egypt. The monastery itself has a Syrian historical presence, either in pilgrimage or part of a united St Antony/St Paul *hegoumenos*. A working hypothesis is suggested that these manuscripts and material culture and the multi-cultural history of the monastery reflects some of this history. A second purpose is to examine the similarity of the hand and language of these inscriptions. This paper will use the first purpose to situate the inscriptions and hypothesise authorship within a multicultural and postcolonial Coptic experience. Secondly, the paper then conducts a cognitive linguistic study including descriptive linguistic observations on orthography, idiom and grammatical construction. Far beyond Syriac late antiquity and the Syriac Renaissance, material culture of this kind reflects a respect for former works and the survival of minorities of faith over time.

611-40/4

*Daniel King (SIL and Cardiff University)***The Syriac Philosophical Lexicon: An Example of Its Development**

We will present a short example of how ordinary Syriac terms could be adapted in their usage to function as translation terms for Greek philosophy, and how such terms could shift their usages over time.

611-40/5

*James Nathan Ford (Bar-Ilan University, Israel)***Lexical Peculiarities of the Syriac Magic Bowls**

As is well known, the language of the Syriac magic bowls shows many phonological and grammatical features which distinguish it from Classical Syr-

iac. This paper deals with the elements of the lexicon of these bowls which are not presently attested in Classical Syriac. Many of the terms are shared with the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic and/or Mandaic magic bowls, while a few are unique to the Syriac tradition. They include both native Aramaic lexemes and loan-words from Akkadian and Persian.

611-40/6

*Shlomi Efrati (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium)*

**Bulls and Filth: New Readings in the Aramaic Levi Document**

The Aramaic Levi Document (henceforth ALD) is an Early Jewish composition describing the life and priestly initiation of—not surprisingly—the patriarch Levi. Fragments of ALD were preserved in several manuscripts in Qumran, in a single medieval manuscript from the Cairo genizah, and in a Greek translation. The reconstruction of the early form(s) of ALD is a formidable task, both due to the fragmentary state of the textual witnesses and because they exhibit various textual discrepancies. While many of these discrepancies most likely reflect corrupt textual transmission, they might also attest to ALD's varying textual forms already in Antiquity. In this paper I will offer new textual and lexical interpretations of a couple of passages from the priestly instructions in ALD, carried out as part of the preparation of a new edition of the Aramaic Qumran scrolls, directed by prof. Elisha Qimron. On the basis of a fresh examination of the fragmentary manuscripts, both from Qumran and the genizah, and a new collation of all the textual evidence, I will point to hitherto unnoticed lexical and terminological correlations between ALD, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, and Rabbinic Hebrew. These interpretations, if correct, contribute new lexemes to the Aramaic lexicon, while the terminological correlations between ALD—in its various versions—and the Rabbinic sources point to the antiquity of certain Rabbinic cultic terms and help affirm the historical-cultic reality behind both the literary fiction of ALD and the exegetical innovations of the Rabbis.