

## PREFACE

The present volume is the final (though by no means definitive) result of a work that began some years ago, when I was trying to demonstrate that the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* was not—as previously thought—based on a lost intermediary Pahlavi translation of the original Greek text, but was, on the contrary, a translation into Syriac of an original Greek version (see Ciancaglini 1998 and 2001b). Before finding some "significant" textual errors which were explainable only as misunderstanding of Greek written sequences, I spent some time analysing the overall linguistic condition of the text, with the aim of investigating the consistency of the vocabulary of Iranian origin and explaining its presence. Looking for bibliography on this topic, I found only one systematic work, and a very old one at that, namely *Persische, armenische und indische Wörter im Syrischen*, contained in the *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* by Paul de Lagarde, which dates back to 1866 (Lagarde GA 1–84). There are in addition some important contributions on specific aspects and texts. These include the outstanding works by Philippe Gignoux (Gignoux 1998–1999 and 1998)<sup>1</sup> on the Iranian words in the Syriac *Book of Medicines*, a paper by Mauro Maggi on Persian glosses in East Syriac texts (Maggi 2003), and a paper by Paola Orsatti on Syro-Persian formulas in baptist liturgy (Orsatti 2003).

Karl Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halle 1928<sup>2</sup>) provides another source on the topic of the Iranian lexical borrowings in Syriac. Here the lemmata include brief etymological indications. However, concerning words of Iranian origin, Brockelmann bases himself essentially on Lagarde's work of 1866. As a consequence, his *Lexicon* exhibits many of the same shortcomings evident in his source: he fails to recognize the Iranian origin of many words, and even when he does, he almost exclusively compares the loanwords with New Persian, so that the reader is left with the impression that he regards New Persian as the source of most of the borrowings, although Syriac certainly borrowed from other Iranian languages too.

On the contrary, other Middle Aramaic varieties have been better studied from the point of view of contact with Iranian languages. Telegdi's work (1935) is still useful regarding Talmudic Aramaic, though the reader should be warned that the borrowings are assigned to different chronological levels according to criteria which are sometimes questionable. We also have at our disposal a number of recent contributions by Shaked (e.g. Shaked 1987; 1993; 1994; 1995); he is preparing a detailed commentary on Aramaic words of Iranian origin, which will be included in a planned dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, edited by M. Sokoloff.<sup>2</sup>

Shaked (1985) and Naveh and Shaked (1985; index of Iranian words on p. 288) also deal with the Iranian borrowings in inscriptions on the Aramaic magic bowls

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Gignoux 1975–1976 and 1982. Another interesting paper about the relationships between Aramaic (the oldest Syriac of Edessa included) and other neighbouring languages is Healey 1995.

<sup>2</sup> The project was announced by Shaked 1994, 106 n. 1.

from Mesopotamia. The Iranian borrowings in Mandaic have been systematically studied by Widengren (1960, 89–108), although this scholar is sometimes too eager to attribute to them a Parthian origin. We also possess a large number of notes scattered in Th. Nöldeke's *Mandäische Grammatik* (Halle an der Saale 1875),<sup>3</sup> as well as the etymological indications in the lemmata of E.S. Drower and R. Macuch's *Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford 1963), for which, however, the same reservations mentioned above in regard to the etyma contained in Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum* are more or less valid.

The disparity between the number of linguistic and philological studies on Syriac and on other Middle Aramaic varieties confirms Sokoloff's observation, quoted by Daniels (1997, 129 f.), that the amount of work devoted to each of the Aramaic languages is in inverse proportion to the quantity of materials preserved in each: as Daniels observes, Syriac is the most neglected of the Classical Semitic languages.

The research on the topic of the Iranian borrowings into Syriac is thus still unsatisfactory. In recent years, while collecting material for this volume, I have written two papers about the generalities of this topic (see Ciancaglini 2005 and forthcoming a), whose contents have been partly utilized here.

I have drawn the relevant material almost exclusively from the excellent Syriac dictionaries at our disposal, namely the aforementioned *Lexicon Syriacum* by Brockelmann, and R. Payne Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford 1879–1901), with the related *Supplement*, edited by J. Payne Smith (Oxford 1927), and from secondary bibliography, with no systematic new examination of the textual tradition of all the texts in which Iranian loanwords occur (that is, the great majority, if not all, of the Syriac texts). The reason is not only that a similar procedure would have taken an enormous amount of time, but also that it would have been more or less impossible without a real new edition of every text. In fact, many editions of Syriac texts date from the 19th century and have often been prepared on the basis of questionable philological criteria (like that of the *codex optimus* etc.).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the editions of many Syriac texts—including those replete with Iranian borrowings—have in most cases been prepared by important scholars who were fully conversant with Semitic studies, like E.A.W. Budge and G. Hoffmann, but who knew nothing, or too little, about Iranian languages: they fail to recognize the presence or the models of many Iranian loanwords, and they tend to take too many liberties in correcting the texts.

Among the difficulties I have run into in compiling this volume, a major one concerns the lexicological and philological tools at our disposal for ancient Iranian languages. If we consider, for instance, the linguistic interference between Classical Syriac and Middle Persian, the lack of a complete (and etymological) dictionary of

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<sup>3</sup> These notes are now substantially more accessible since Mancini has organized them into the *index iranicus* published as an appendix in Mancini 1985.

<sup>4</sup> On the editorial criteria of the Syriac *Alexander Romance* see Ciancaglini 2001a, 121; a general picture of the recent editions of Syriac texts is available in Brock 1997.

Middle Persian creates a serious difficulty,<sup>5</sup> especially because up-to-date editions of a great number of Pahlavi texts do not yet exist.

Moreover, I chose to disregard the onomastics of Iranian origin, including proper names,<sup>6</sup> toponyms, ethnonyms, hydronyms and so on. In fact, onomastics is a particularly painstaking and frustrating field of etymological research, because proper names (and especially place names) generally undergo highly irregular phonological changes, resulting from substratal interference, folk-etymology, contamination etc.<sup>7</sup> This also happens because proper names do not have a real meaning (a *signifié*, in Saussurean terms), but only a denotatum: consequently, etymologies of proper names are only based on their phonic form.<sup>8</sup> Being so irregular, proper names are generally not included in etymological dictionaries, and therefore they are beyond the scope of the present work.

However, I hope that my work, even if not exhaustive, will at least be useful for further studies. My principal aim is that the collected material will be reliable enough to become the basis of studies of different kinds.

In fact, the analysis of Iranian borrowings into Syriac has produced some interesting results: from the point of view of general linguistics, this research helps to clarify some aspects of the general question of bilingualism and diglossia and may also contribute to our understanding of the mechanisms of translatability and convertibility between languages in contact. In the last few years the field of the typology of linguistic change induced by contact with other languages has been deeply investigated, and we dispose of important and up-to-date theoretical tools: I refer here especially to the excellent book by S.G. Thomason and T. Kaufman (1988), and to another first-rate miscellaneous volume on bilingualism in ancient society, edited by J.N. Adams, M. Janse and S. Swain in 2002. This last work is of particular interest here because it is entirely devoted to the study of contact between languages attested only in written texts, especially classical languages, whereas the majority of linguistic studies on language contact examine, or are based on, modern languages (starting from the excellent work by Weinreich 1953). Therefore, the authors of this volume faced the same practical and theoretical problems with which I have met in studying the interference phenomena between Syriac and Iranian languages.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the typology of interaction between Syriac and Iranian languages, as we shall see further on, fits well enough into the theoretical frame provided by Thomason and Kaufman 1988, even though it is a situation that shows some important peculiar features.

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<sup>5</sup> An important project meant to fill this lacuna was announced by Sh. Shaked and C.G. Cereti at a conference held in Rome: see Shaked – Cereti 2005.

<sup>6</sup> The Iranian proper names appearing in Syriac texts are the topic of a forthcoming monographic volume that Philippe Gignoux is preparing for the *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Trask 1996, 350-353.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Meillet 1925, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Among the papers contained in Adams - Janse - Swain 2002, a particularly interesting one, from this point of view, is the work by D.G.K. Taylor, focused on the interaction between Greek and Aramaic: cf. Taylor 2002.

I also hope that my research will be useful to scholars interested in Middle Iranian lexicography: in fact, an important result of my analysis is the recovery of a certain amount of Middle Persian words not otherwise known. Many of the Middle Persian models of Iranian borrowings into Syriac do not seem to be attested in those Middle Persian texts that have come down to us. Obviously, because of the aforementioned lack of a complete Middle Persian dictionary, one might have the impression that a Middle Persian word is unattested. However, this impression is likely to be illusory: a word may have occurred in the texts we possess, but it is simply not recorded in the partial dictionaries available to us. Nevertheless, many words among the Middle Persian ones borrowed or quoted in Syriac texts are in fact unattested, especially words pertaining to the semantic areas of medicine, botany, mineralogy etc., but also words pertaining to administration.<sup>10</sup>

I would like to thank all the scholars, colleagues and friends who generously helped me in writing this book. I am especially grateful to Philippe Gignoux, Leonid Kogan, Mauro Maggi and Nicholas Sims-Williams, who read and commented in detail a draft of the whole text, suggesting many improvements, and to many colleagues and friends who discussed with me various problematic points and provided insights into various etyma of Syriac words, in particular Albio C. Cassio, Carlo G. Cereti, Riccardo Contini, Olivier Durand, Sergey Loesov and Paola Orsatti.

The book is dedicated to the beloved memory of Professor Scevola Mariotti and Father Yoseph Habbi, two extraordinary men and scholars, as a little token of my lasting love and gratitude.

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<sup>10</sup> Some good examples have been provided by Gignoux 1980, 194 ff.