SECONDARY FORMATIONS FROM GREEK LOANWORDS IN SYRIAC

Sebastian Brock

1. INTRODUCTION

The influence of Greek on all the Late Aramaic dialects was strong, but in no case was this more so than in Syriac: several Greek loanwords are already found in the Peshitta Pentateuch, which in all likelihood goes back to the second century AD, while in the Old Syriac Gospels there are roughly eighty.

The vast majority of direct borrowings of Greek words in Syriac are nouns, and are derived from Greek nouns. Although there are also many Syriac verbs of Greek origin, these are almost all secondary formations based on earlier nominal forms (for these, see below, section 3); only in a small number of cases is a Syriac verbal form the primary form borrowed, though even this may derive from a Greek noun rather than a verb. This probably applies to qatreg ‘accuse’ < G[kreek] katēgoros (rather than katēgorein), and zawweg ‘join’, ‘marry’ < G zeugos (rather than zeugein), both of which are attested very early in Syriac.


For these, see J. Joosten, “Greek and Latin words in the Peshitta Pentateuch: first soundings”, in Symposium Syriacum, VII, pp. 37–47.

These are listed in my “Greek words in the Syriac Gospels (vet. and pe.)”, Le Muséon 80 (1967), pp. 389–426.

In texts of the seventh century and later, also ‘predicate’.

Zawweg already occurs in Genesis 45:22, and zawweg in the Old Syriac Gospels. I use a simplified transcription of the Syriac forms; it should be noted that the vocalization and orthography of many Greek loanwords is not fixed.

loanwords that are definitely taken directly from Greek verbs include the very common *appis* ‘urge, request’ (rather than ‘persuade’) < *G* *peisai* (aor. inf.), alongside such rarer verbs such as *pargel* ‘bid, command’ < *G* *paraggellein*, or *qasmes* < *G* *kosmein*. For a limited period, during the sixth and seventh centuries, and probably only within the Roman Empire, there was a fashion to construct Syriac verbal forms from Greek aorist infinitives, together with an auxiliary verb: either *'bad* with active infinitives, or *hwa* with passive (for these, see Section 4).

For the most part, this contribution is concerned with various inner-Syriac developments concerning words taken over from Greek, with special attention paid to any diachronic patterns that can be discerned.6 In passing it should be noted that Syriac is the only Late Aramaic dialect which develops this potential.

2.

SECONDARY FORMATIONS FROM NOUNS

Syriac has three very productive affixes: in -*aya*, denoting adjectives; in -*uta*, denoting abstracts; and in -*a'it*, denoting adverbs. From an early date Greek loanwords begin to make good use of these formations. Occurrences from earlier than the fourth century are:

- *asofuta* < *asota* < *G* *asōtos*; already in Peshitta Is. 28.7.
- *arkonuta* ‘archonship’ < *arkona* < *G* *archōn*; the only known occurrence is in P. Mesopotamia B.5, dated AD 242.
- *estratiguta* ‘office of general’ < *estratiga* < *G* *stratēgos*; P Dura 28 (dated AD 243).7
- *hegmonuta* ‘governorship’ < *hegmona* < *G* *hegêmōn*; Old Syriac Gospels.
- *tronuta* < *trona* < *G* *turanos*; Wis. 16:4, III Macc. 7:5.

While a number of further abstracts, along with some adverbs, based on Greek loanwords feature in fourth- and fifth-century texts,8 adjectival formations hardly begin to appear before the sixth century, from which time they become increasingly common; the only exception to this is provided by terms used to denote professions (e.g. *bursaya* ‘cobbler’ < *G* *burseus*; *lislaya* ‘robber’ < *G* *lēistes*; *putqaya* ‘inkeeper’ < *putqa* < *G* *pandocheion*), and by *namosaya* < *namosa* < *G*...
nomos, which already occurs in the Syriac translations of Eusebius and Titus of Bostra, and is found is John the Solitary, Narsai and Jacob of Serugh in the fifth century. The following secondary formations in \(-uta\) and \(-a'it\) are found in texts of the fourth and fifth century:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{agoni\-\textit{stuta}} ‘(ascetic) contest’ < \textit{agoni\-\textit{sta}} < \textit{G agoni\-\textit{st}\-\textit{ēs}}.
  \item \textit{asoi\-\textit{a'it}} ‘stupidly’ < \textit{asoi\-\textit{a}} < \textit{G asō\-\textit{os}} (\textit{Liber Graduum}; Narsai).
  \item \textit{ali\-\textit{tuta}} ‘athletic contest (figurative only)’ < \textit{ali\-\textit{ita}} < \textit{G athlē\-\textit{tēs}} (Aphrahat, Narsai), and \textit{ali\-\textit{tā'it}} (Narsai).
  \item \textit{eparkuta} ‘eparchy’ < \textit{eparkai\-\textit{heparka}} < \textit{G eparchos} (Eusebius, \textit{Hist. Eccl.}).
  \item \textit{episqoputa} ‘office’ (Peshitta \textit{Acts}); ‘episcopacy’ < \textit{episqopa} < \textit{G episkopos}.
  \item \textit{ge'ometruta} ‘geometry’ < \textit{ge'omet\-\textit{ra}} < \textit{G gé\-\textit{omētrēs}} (Ephrem, \textit{Prose Refutations}).
  \item \textit{gramat\-\textit{iquata}} ‘grammar’ < \textit{gramati\-\textit{qa}} < \textit{G gramma\-\textit{tikōs}} (Eusebius, \textit{Theophania}; \textit{Clementine Recognitions}).
  \item \textit{ludaruta} < \textit{ludara} < \textit{G loudarios} < Latin \textit{ludarius} (Eusebius, \textit{Theophania}).
  \item \textit{magistruta} < \textit{magistra} < \textit{G magistros} < Latin \textit{magister} (Eusebius, \textit{Hist. Eccl.}).
  \item \textit{musiqaruta} ‘making music’ < \textit{musiqara} < \textit{G mousikōs} (Eusebius, \textit{Theophania}).
  \item \textit{namosa'it} ‘according to the Law/law’ < \textit{namosa} < \textit{nomos} (Acts of Thomas, Ephrem).
  \item \textit{pilsaputa} ‘philosophy’ < \textit{pilsapa} < \textit{G philosophos} (Peshitta \textit{Col. 2:8}).
  \item \textit{rhi\-\textit{ruta}} ‘rhetoric’ < \textit{rhi\-\textit{ra}} < \textit{G rhē\-\textit{tor}} (Eusebius, \textit{Theophania}).
  \item \textit{tet\-\textit{arkuta} ‘tetrarchy’ < \textit{tet\-\textit{arka}} < \textit{G tetrarchōs}} (Eusebius, \textit{Hist. Eccl.}).
\end{itemize}

Many further examples are first attested in sixth-century texts.

Early adjectival formations of the sixth century which quickly gain widespread use include:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{adshaya} ‘belonging to the species’ < \textit{adsha} < \textit{G eidos}.
  \item \textit{a'araya} ‘aerial’ < \textit{a'ar} < \textit{G aēr}.
  \item \textit{anani\-\textit{aya}} ‘necessary’ < \textit{ananiqi} < \textit{G anagkē}.
  \item \textit{atiraya} ‘celestial’ < \textit{atir} < \textit{G aithēr}.
  \item \textit{balanaya} ‘bathhouse attendant’ < \textit{balani} < \textit{G balaneion}.
  \item \textit{episqopaya} ‘episcopal’ < \textit{episqopa} < \textit{G episkopos}.
  \item \textit{eskologi\-\textit{aya}} ‘student’ < \textit{eskoli} < \textit{G scholē}.
  \item \textit{es\-\textit{tukaya}} ‘elemental’ < \textit{es\-\textit{tuka}} < \textit{G stoicheion}.
  \item \textit{ewangelaya} ‘pertaining to the Gospel, evangelical’ < \textit{ewangelyon} < \textit{G euaggelion}.
  \item \textit{hereti\-\textit{qaya}} ‘heretical’ < \textit{hereti\-\textit{qai} < G hai\-\textit{retikōs}.
  \item \textit{hulaya} (also \textit{hulanaya}) ‘material’ < \textit{huli} < \textit{G hulē}.
  \item \textit{pars\-\textit{opaya}} ‘personal, prosopic’ < \textit{pars\-\textit{opa} < G prosō\-\textit{pon}}.
\end{itemize}
By the end of the seventh century well over sixty adjectival forms based on Greek loanwords are current, and the number continues to increase in the following centuries.

Beyond the basic word formations in -uta, -aya and -a’it, there are a number of secondary forms: -ayuta; -ana, -anuta, -ana’it; -anayuta; -tana, -tanuta, and -tana’it; -tanayuta. Several of these extended formations are not attested even for native Syriac roots until the fifth century or later, and in some cases they can serve as useful criteria in helping to locate chronologically undated texts: only very rarely do these formations based on Greek loanwords occur before the sixth century. For each of these word formations I give a list of the more common examples, along with an indication of the century (given as a Roman numeral) when they are first attested. In many cases these new formations probably entered into usage through translations of Greek texts, in order to meet the need (felt especially by translators of the late sixth and seventh century) to provide formal Syriac equivalents to Greek grammatical forms.

-ayuta:

aksnayuta ‘alien status; life as stranger to the world’ < aksnaya < G xenos (already in Peshitta Ben Sira 29:22).
anangqayuta ‘necessity’ < anangqi < G anangkê; IX.
bursayuta ‘cobbler’s craft’ < bursaya < G burseus; VI.
eskolayuta < eskolaya < eskoli < G scholê; VII.
listayuta ‘banditry’ < listaya < G leistês; IV/V (Eusebius, Theophania).
namosayuta ‘legality’ < namosaya < namosa < G nomos; VI/VI.
ortoduksayuta ‘orthodoxy’ < ortoduksa < ortoduksa < G orthodoxos; VI/VI.
qanonayula ‘canonicity’ < qanonaya < qanova < G kanôn; VI.
usyayuta ‘essentiality’ < usyaya, usya < G ousia; VI/VI.

-anaya

esluksanaya ‘elemental’ < esluksana < esluksa < G stoicheion; VII.
gensanaya ‘generic’ < gensana < gensa < G genos; VII.
hulanaya (alongside hulaya, above); VII.
tupsanaya ‘figurative, typical’ < tupsana < tupsa < G tups; VII.

-a’it

gensana’it ‘generically’ < gensana (etc., as above); VI (Jacob of Serugh).
estuksana’it ‘elementally’ < estuksana (etc., as above); VII.
tupsana’it ‘figuratively’ < tupsana (etc., as above); VII.
Secondary Formations from Greek Loanwords in Syriac

- anayuta
  adshanayuta ‘specificity’ < adshanaya < adshana < G eidos; VII/VIII.
  espiranayuta ‘sphericity’ < espirinaya < espira < G sphaira; VII.
  hulanayuta ‘materiality’ < hulanaya < hulana < huli < G hulê; VII.

- tana
  eskimtana ‘honourable; dissembler’ < eskima < G schêma; IV.
  haromtana ‘fragrant’ < haroma < G arôma; VIII.
  kromtana ‘bold-faced, audacious’ < kroma < G chrôma; V.

- tanuta
  eskimtanuta ‘hypocrisy’ < eskimtana (etc., as above); VI.
  haromtanuta ‘fragrance’ < haromtana (etc., as above); VIII/IX.
  kromtanuta ‘audacity, cheek’ < kromtana (etc., as above); VI.

- tanatana
  eskimtana’tit ‘dissemblingly’ < eskimtana (etc., as above; already occurs in Peshitta Ben Sira 26:24 and the Liber Legum Regionum).
  purstana’tit ‘craftily’ < purstana < pursa < G poros; VII.
  kromtanuta’tit ‘audaciously’ < kromtana (etc., as above); VI.

- tanayuta
  haromtanayuta ‘fragrant quality’ < haromtana (etc.; no haromtanaya attested); IX.

3. DENOMINATIVE VERBS

As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of Syriac verbal forms of Greek origin are secondary derivations based on a nominal form. With only very few exceptions, these derivatives are always paīel formations (several only occur in the passive, etpaīel). The following are commonly, or reasonably commonly, found; again, the century when each is first attested is given as a Roman numeral: 9

katres ‘depose’ < kataresis < G kathairesis; VI.
lasti ‘rob’ < listaya < G leistès; VI.
nawwe/etnawwag ‘shipwreck’ < G nauagos; VII.
(parras) etparras ‘devise’ < pursa, G poros; first attested in the Clementine Recognitions (in a manuscript dated AD 411), and very common from fifth century onwards.

---

9 An isolated example of p‘el is provided by mlat ‘practice, study’ (already in Peshitta Prov. 26:17), perhaps derived directly from the Greek verb meletan (though mlato < G meletê does occur rarely); and one of the af‘el is to be found in azweg, beside zawweg.

10 I have excluded parnes, whose etymology is unclear; one possibility is G pronoos. It provides many secondary formations.
SI. BÁSilAN
BR0,CK
(qappas) etqappas ‘be provided with mosaics’ < qupsa < G kubos; the only known occurrence is in a mosaic inscription dated AD 556.¹¹
sakkem ‘shape, delineate’ < eskima < G schéma; VI.
ssaqem ‘measure, define’ < siqoma < G sêkôma; VI (Cyrus of Edessa).
(tappa) etqappas ‘fry; be tormented’ < tigna < G tēgaros; active already in Peshitta Jer. 29:22; passive in Eusebius, Hist. Eccl.
(takken) ettakkan ‘be skilful’ < tekna < G technê; VI.
takkes ‘put in order’ < jaksa < G taxis; already in Peshitta Cant. 2:4 and 1 Tim. 3:2; subsequently very common.
tappes ‘typify’ < tupsa < G tupos; V.
yaqgen ‘delineate’ < yunna < G eikôn; VII.
zaffem ‘investigate, bring charges’ < zîtima < G zēêma; the noun occurs in Peshitta Acts, the verb first in Liber Graduum.
zawweg ‘join together, unite; marry’ < zawga < G zeugos; both the noun and the verb are already found in the Old Syriac Gospels.

From the late sixth century onwards, further new quadriliteral verbal forms (following the model of qatreg) become popular, e.g. palsar ‘falsify’ < palsara < G phalsarios < Latin falsarius; palsep ‘philosophize’ < pilsapa < G philosophos; patek ‘make patriarch’ < patryarka < G patriarchês. In the early seventh century, a number of new forms feature for the first time in (for example) the Syrohexapla and Harkleian, e.g. etaswaj ‘act stupidly’ < asota, mawren ‘embalm’ < muron.

Several of the denominatives listed above give rise to further derivations, based usually on the participle, both active and passive. The following affixes are found:

-uta
msaqgmuta ‘proportion’; VI (Cyrus of Edessa).
mfakkusuta ‘orderliness’, already in Peshitta Col. 2:5.
mfawguta ‘married state’; VI.

-a’it
msaqgma’it ‘symmetrically’; late VII (Jacob of Edessa and Isaac of Ninevah).
mfakkasa’it ‘in an orderly way’; V (Narsai).

-ana¹²
mfakkansana ‘someone who puts in order’; VI.
mfappsana ‘figurative, typifying’; early VII (Gabriel Qatraya).
myaqgnana ‘characterising, characteristic’; VII.

¹¹ Ed. A. Abu Assaf, in Annales archéologiques arabes de Syrie 22 (1972), pp. 135–144; it reads bōsr inmns’ wātyn inmns’ b’yrh šyrn b’yrh bks’ bh ‘tups kn’ byl[ ] w’sitlty[ ] pssmn ‘In the year 868 [sc. of the Seleucid era], in the month Teshrin II [November], at the full moon, this building was provided with mosaics, and the cistern was completed’.

¹² These formations may function either as nouns or as adjectives.
Secondary Formations from Greek Loanwords in Syriac

4. BORROWINGS BASED ON GREEK AORIST INFINITIVES

The sixth and seventh centuries witnessed a temporary fashion for borrowing Greek aorist infinitives (active and passive), and providing them with an auxiliary verb, 'bad 'do/make' with active verbs, and hwa 'be' with passive.14 The practice seems to have very largely confined to writers working within the Roman Empire. Some thirty different Greek verbs receiving treatment in this way are found quite commonly in texts of the sixth/seventh century, after which the usage becomes rare. The following examples occur very frequently:15

13 The mosaics are published by M. Krebernik, “Schriftfristen aus Tell Bi‘a 1990”, in Mitteilungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin 13 (1991), pp. 41–70, esp. 42–50; the relevant part of both texts reads “In month N of the year N ... this provision of mosaic took place (hw’ qups’ hn’)...”

14 The active, with ‘bad, is reminiscent of the similar usage in Bohairic with P.

15 The orthography varies considerably in the manuscripts between -ys ‘-yn’ and -s ‘-n’, though the former are the dominant spellings.
What are probably the earliest examples of this practice are to be found in the Syriac translation of the Didascalia, which some have dated as early as the fourth century; their presence (and that of certain other features), however, suggest that the translation really belongs to at least a century later.

5. SOME HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE GREEK LOANWORDS

Certain loanwords of Greek origin prove to be highly productive in Syriac, sometimes even from a fairly early period, perhaps none more so than appis < G peísai, which gave rise to the following secondary formations:

- based on participle: mpisana, mpisamuta, mpisana’it; mpasuta; metmpisana, metmpisamuta, metmpisana’it;
- formed from the root pys: pýasa, pýasaya, pýasta;
- new formation, but again based on the Greek aorist infin.: pise ‘bad.

Other very productive Greek loanwords are:

- gensa < G genos, which produces gensaya; gensana, gensanaya, gensamuta, gensana’it; gensanyuta; gannes/etgannas; mgannsuta, mgannsana’it; mgannsana; mgannsana; gumnasa.
- eskima < G schéma, producing eskimuta, eskimtana, eskimtanuta, eskimtana’it, sakkem/estakkam; msakkmama, mestakkmama, mestakkmmanuta; sukkama.
- qatrego/eqaqtrag (rarely etqafgar) < G katégros, from which derive mqaqtraguta, mqaqtraga’it; mqaqtragana, mqaqtraganuta, mqaqtragana’it; metaqtragana, metaqtragamuta, metaqtragana’it; qafraga; qafragana/ qafriganuta.

16 The Harklean margin at 2 Cor. 3:19 offers a completely new formation based on the Greek root: etkarten!

17 The two forms that occur there are kindunse ‘bad and kirotonitina hwa.

18 There are also the independent borrowings, qatigora < G katégoria, and qatigorqay < G katégorikos.
Secondary Formations from Greek Loanwords in Syriac

- ṭaksa < G taxis, whence ṭaksanaya, and especially the following secondary formations based on the denominative ṭakkes/ἔπτάκκασ: ṭaksuṭa, ṭaksā’it; ṭaksanula, ṭaksanula’it; metṭaksanula; ṭukkasa.
- ṭekna < G tekni, whence ṭeknaṭa, ṭeknā’it; takken/ἔπτάκκαν; ṭakknuta, ṭakkna’it; ṭakknaṭa, ṭakknaṭa’it; metṭakknaṭa, metṭakknaṭa’it; ṭukkan, ṭukkanaya.
- ṭupsa < G tups, which produces ṭupsaṭa, ṭupsanāya, ṭupsananyuta, ṭupsanā’it; ṭappes; ṭappṣuṭa, ṭappṣa’it, ṭappṣanula, ṭappṣanula’it; metṭappṣanula, metṭappṣanula’it.

By way of a final note, it should be mentioned that the standard Syriac dictionaries vary considerably in their coverage of these secondary word formations (whether or not they have Greek loanwords as their basis);19 thus many of the forms just listed do not occur until texts of the medieval period and will only be found in T. Audo’s Dictionnaire de la langue chaldéenne/Simta d-leššana suryaya (Mosul, 1897, and reprints).

As an admirer of Professor Tapani Harviainen’s publications in many different areas of Semitic philology, it is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to offer, in his honour, this brief schematic outline of an intriguing topic that would seem to invite further investigation.

---
