

PŪRVĀPARAPRAJÑĀBHINANDANAM
EAST AND WEST, PAST AND PRESENT

**Indological and Other Essays
in Honour of Klaus Karttunen**

EDITED BY

BERTIL TIKKANEN & ALBION M. BUTTERS

STUDIA ORIENTALIA 110

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SYRIAC POEMS WRITTEN BY FINNISH SCHOLARS IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Tapani Harviainen

Ad fontes – to the sources! This was the slogan of two of the most important cultural and spiritual movements of the 15th and 16th centuries – Humanism and the Protestant Reformation. Both ideologies proclaimed a return to the genuine form of venerable literature, i.e. the Greek authors of antiquity and the original text of the Holy Scriptures written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek instead of Latin. Study of these “Holy Tongues” was embarked upon by both individual scholars and universities, where also young students studied Greek and Hebrew. Interest in Semitic languages soon extended from Hebrew to various dialects of Aramaic – Syriac in particular – and to Arabic and Ethiopian languages.

From the second part of the 16th century until the middle of the 19th century, every cultivated person was expected to know Latin, Greek and, to some extent at least, Hebrew as well. This was especially the case in the central and northern European countries, where a university education was a prerequisite for a higher career in public service.

In this spirit, when the first university was established in Finland in 1640, a *Linguarum professio* (i.e. a professorship of Greek and Semitic languages) was included among the eleven initial Chairs. Other branches of Asian and African research in Finland, including South Asian studies (represented with distinction by Professor Klaus Karttunen), have grown from this trunk.

Just as the students of the Holy Tongues were proud of their knowledge,¹ they were also proud to display their abilities. At the same time it is obvious that they were often interested in receiving fame, glory and material reward for these abilities. Three literary genres offered a special opportunity to such ambitions.

¹ Cf. Johannes Hottinger’s quotation of “an old saying” in the introduction of his *Thesaurus Philologicus seu Clavis Scripturæ* (1649): “verissima esse trita illa apophthegmata: Homine Grammaticæ Hebrææ perito doctius nihil est. Optimus Grammaticus Hebræus, optimus Theologus. Scriptura non potest intelligi Theologicè, nisi prius intelligatur Grammaticè” [“These three statements are most true: No man is more educated than he who is familiar with the grammar of Hebrew. The best grammarian of Hebrew is the best theologian. It is impossible to understand the Scriptures theologically, if they are not formerly understood grammatically.”].

First, academic dissertations could be composed in Greek or Hebrew (instead of the customary Latin).² Secondly, the dissertations allowed for copious dedications and acknowledgements to be addressed to the *praeses* professor, the respondent, or, in numerous cases, to a wealthy Maecenas. Thirdly, the use of the Holy Tongues was perfectly suited for employment in poems and other texts published in the fashionable booklets of those times (printed in honour of a wedding, appointment or inauguration to an office, a funeral, etc.). Such texts were usually written in Latin or a local language. More educated men, however, could write them in Greek or Hebrew – or most ambitiously, in other Semitic languages.

On the basis of three excellent bibliographies,³ I have been able to collect Semitic texts of this type written by Finnish scholars or scholars connected with Finland between the years 1584 and 1807. The total number of these works in Semitic languages is 68; the shortest ones consist of only a couple lines, while the longest extend to a page and half. Of the 68 Semitic texts, 55 were written in Hebrew, six in Syriac, five in other dialects of Aramaic, and two in Arabic.

Of the six poems in Syriac, only two appear in the Syriac script, *serṭo*. Three others are described by their authors as representing Syriac, even though they are printed in Hebrew characters.

I am preparing an edition with commentaries on all these Semitic texts which, it must be pointed out, were written by Christian scholars. In the Swedish Empire during that period, Jews were not allowed to settle. As Finland was part of the Empire, the rule applied here as well. Because the authors of these texts could not depend on the Hebrew or Aramaic knowledge of their Jewish colleagues – as was the case in Germany or the Netherlands, for example – our predecessors had to rely upon their own studies alone.

From a linguistic point of view, their dedications, laments, eulogies and so forth reveal interesting parallels with the revival process of Hebrew in both the *haskala* period and the modern period. New terminology had to be coined, particularly in regard to university life – disputations, professors, diplomas, respondents and dissertations being jargon that was lacking in the traditional Hebrew or Syriac literature.

Numerous problems arise in the interpretation of these texts. While they are partly a result of authorial or printer error, some are due to the effect of Latin upon the authors and others reveal *licentia poetica*, the sovereign attitude

² For Greek texts written by Finnish scholars in the same period, see Korhonen (2004) and Paulinus (Lillienstedt) (1678/2000).

³ Melander (1951), Vallinkoski (1962–1969), and Laine & Nyqvist (1996) (= SKB).

of learned authors who consider themselves above linguistic norms. We shall see several examples of these below.⁴

It goes without saying that Finland was not the only country where Christian students of Semitic languages hoped to delight their superiors and friends with the fruit of their philological achievements. Similar Hebrew, Syriac and other Semitic texts were even more extensively published in the universities of the Swedish mainland.⁵ However, thanks to remarkably meticulous bibliographies, the assembling of Semitic texts in Finland has been a quite easy task. I hope that my initiative will serve as a stimulating example for colleagues in other countries. Today the Semitic languages are no longer part and parcel of a normal good education. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the achievements of our predecessors merit a return to the map of the history of Semitic studies at the European universities.

TEXT 1



The oldest of the “Finnish” Syriac poems (Melander No. 113 – SKB No. 1075) was written by Aeschillus (Eskil) Petraeus (1593–1657) in Rostock, Germany in 1627, in honour of the fresh *magister* Jonas Eriki Dryander.⁶ Born in Sweden,

4 For the rhetoric structures of 266 “Finnish” texts in Greek, 208 texts in French and six in Italian dating back to the same period, see Korhonen (2004: 149–190), Härmä & Suomela-Härmä (2007), and Härmä (2010).

5 See the less successful edition of the Hebrew and Syriac poems in the collections in memory of Catharina Tidemanni (d. Uppsala, Sweden in 1628), published in Ström 1994, Appendix 5. Another contribution in the field of Semitic studies in the same period deals with the affinity of Hebrew with the native languages of the scholars, see Harviainen (2005).

6 From 1638 on, Jonas Eriki Dryander was the minister of Värnamo in Sweden; he died in 1650. The poem was published in: Εὐφημίαι In Lauream Magistralem ... Dn. Jonæ Dryandri Wexioniæ Sueci, quam ... Contulit ... Vir Clarissimus M. Joannes Huswedelius, Facultatis Philosoph. p. t. Decanus ..., Anno 1627. I. Martij. Rostochi Excudebat Joachimus Pedanus, Acad. Typ. [8 pp.]; 4:0.

Eskil Petraeus studied at the Universities of Uppsala, Wittenberg and Jena. In 1628 he settled in Turku (Aboa/Åbo), Finland. He was Lecturer of Theology in the Cathedral School, Minister of the City, Professor of Theology at the University of Turku (from 1640 on), Bishop of Turku, and the Vice Chancellor of the University (1642–1657). Petraeus studied the Finnish language thoroughly, he led the completion of the first translation of the Bible into Finnish in 1642, and he published the first grammar book of Finnish, *Linguae Finnicæ brevis institutio*, in 1649.

Eskil Petraeus composed almost the same congratulatory poem in Hebrew, “Chaldaic” (i.e. Aramaic), Syriac, Arabic and “Rabbinic” (i.e. Talmudic Aramaic). All of these were printed in Hebrew characters. In Syriac the poem reads:

ḥabr yuna bē-yoma šubḥētāk
wē-ḥade den-na mettulatak
mettul sawe at lē-mesab iqarak
allaha nēmalle kul šebyanak

Although the ultimate stress pattern seems suitable for this poem as well as for other Syriac ones, it is possible that the vowels and doubled consonants should, however, be pronounced according to the Western Syriac tradition (that was followed in the first grammar books of Syriac in Europe). This would imply:

ḥabr yuno be-yomo šubḥetok
we-ḥode den-no metulotok
metul sowe at le-mesab iqorok
aloho nemale kul šebyonok

Jonah, my friend! On the day of your glory
I do rejoice because of you,
since you long to take the glory of yours.
May God fulfil all your will!

As linguistic remarks, we may note that, in fact, no feminine counterpart (*šubḥēta) of the noun šubḥa ‘glory’ occurs in Syriac, and *taw* is an error *pro tet*, appearing twice in the word *mettul*. Furthermore, on the basis of other versions of this poem, one may surmise that instead of *sāwē* ‘to long for’, a word referring to the worthiness of taking the glory would be more probable. We can propose, then, that either Petraeus or his printer erroneously replaced the character *šin* with *simkat* in the Syriac word *šawe / šowe* ‘worthy’.

TEXT 2

The second text (Melander No. 126 – not included in SKB) was published in Uppsala, Sweden in 1629 in the Syriac *serṭo* script with the Western vocalization added. It is a poem in honour of Johannes Raicus (d. 1631), the new Rector of the University of Uppsala, and was written by Petrus A. Schomerus (1607–1660).⁷ Born in Uppsala, Schomerus would later serve as a Professor of Astronomy and Physics, Greek and Theology at the University of Dorpat (Tartu) in Estonia. In 1640 he returned to Sweden, where he was appointed Professor of Theology in Stockholm and Uppsala and, in 1656, made *superintendent* in Kalmar. The text occurs in Melander’s bibliography, although Schomerus and Raicus were more connected with Sweden and Estonia than with Finland.

Transcription according to the Western pronunciation:

men 'il da-šmayo ṭaybuṭo
 ṭovto wa-hwaw loḵ šalmuṭo.
 da-b-puqdokeh loḵ da-mhaymen
 wabzeḥtat (?) b-eskimo tetaqen.

From the God of Heaven, the good
 favour and harmony may be yours,
 so that with His order [given] to you, the believer,
 you construct in disgrace and in raiment.

A printer’s error renders *da-b-pūqdokeh* instead of *da-b-pūqdoneh*. In *mhaymen* the characters *he* and *yodh* are in reverse order. *wabzeḥtat* (or *wabdeḥtat* ?) does not make sense in this context; as a correction I propose *wa-b-bezḥo* ‘and in disgrace’ (although this proposal is not very convincing either). The “free” word order follows the example of Latin and Greek poems.

⁷ Published in: Carmen Panegyricum In Honorem Rectoratus ... Dn. Johannis Raici Schlacovvaldo-Bohemi U. Med. Licent. Et In Regia Ad Salam Sueonum Academia Medicinæ Institutionum Professoris Ordinarij Regij Sceptrum Prænominatæ Academiæ Solenni ritu ... in templo Cathedrali suscipientis 14. Maij Anno 1629. A qvibusdam ... Novi Rectoris Discipulis ... scriptum. Ubsaliæ, Typis Eschilli Matthiæ, Anno 1629. [8 pp]; 4:o.

TEXT 3

This poem (Melander No. 131 – not included in SKB) was also published in the Syriac *serṭo* script, but with an added mix of Western and Eastern vocalization, in an academic programme in Uppsala on 15 May 1631.⁸ It is another congratulatory poem in honour of a Maecenas, this time Michael Wexionius-Gyldenstolpe (1608/9–1670), who was born in the province of Småland in Sweden. After years of study in Germany and Holland he was appointed as Rector in the School of Växjö in Sweden and then as Professor of Ethics, Politics and History at the University of Turku in Finland (from 1640 on). The four lines in Syriac “to the brother as a testimony of intimate love” were written by Nicolaus Andreae Hölmingius (1602–1650). This author hailed from the same province of Småland and enjoyed a scholarship granted by Michael Wexionius-Gyldenstolpe. In his later years, Hölmingius would serve as royal court chaplain and as the Minister of Gårdsby (near Växjö) in Sweden.

Miḥa’el ’aḥi ḥabiḇo
 šekal meliluto ṭobo.
 nešabaḥ hoxil le-moryo
 l-aloho mevarax kul yawmo.

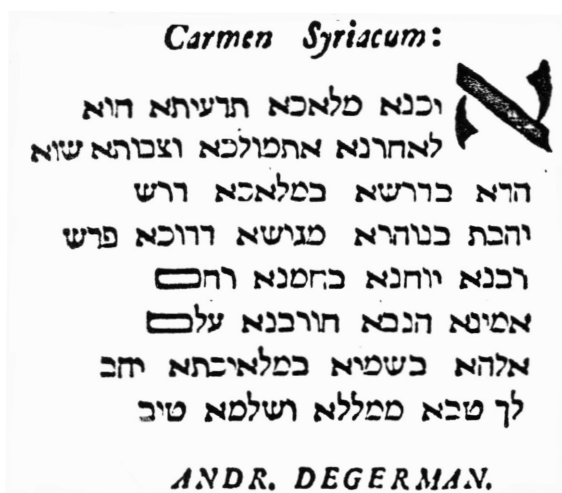
Michael, my dear brother,
 has received a fine eloquence!
 Therefore we praise the Lord,
 the Blessed God, every day.

The spelling of the name Michael with *ḥet* instead of *kaf* is peculiar; the name with *kaf* is well-known in both Hebrew and Syriac. In ‘my brother’, spelled *aḥī*, the suffix of the first person singular should not be pronounced. In *mevarax*, the vowel signs have been moved too far to the right hand side. The improbable *šekal*

8 Published in: Orationem Hanc ... Dn. Caroli C. Gyllenhielm/ L. B. de Berqwara/ ... Regni Suecici Senatoris ... Ammiralij generalis ... Dn. ac Mæcenatis sui Suecorum Salanâ, ... mense Majo, Anno 1631. habebat. Michael O. Wexionius Gyllenhielmianus alumnus. Upsaliæ, Imprimebat Eschillus Matthiæ, Anno 1631. [xx pp.]; 4:0.

with *kaf* is probably a corrupt form instead of the past form *šēqal* ‘he has taken’ or ‘received’. Let us suppose that these are printer errors, not a proof of Mr. Hölmingius’s knowledge of Syriac. The actual intention of *mēlūto* is uncertain; besides ‘eloquence’ it may refer to reason, pronunciation or logic. However, its use in a poem in honour of an academic *oratio* renders eloquence the most suitable candidate, while *dēraš* and *dēraša/derošo* are used for the significant occasion of an academic disputation (see Text 4 below).

TEXT 4



A great number of problems appear in the fourth and longest poem, *Carmen Syriacum*, written by Andreas Degermann (Vallinkoski No. 1848).⁹ The ‘carmen’ was printed in Hebrew characters in Turku in 1704. Andreas Degermann (1672–1752) was the Rector of the Cathedral School in Turku, then later the minister of the city of Jakobstad (Pietarsaari). In addition to this Syriac poem, he also wrote several congratulations in Hebrew and Aramaic. It is obvious that he was especially eager to display his knowledge of Semitic languages, although often at the price of proper grammar and lexicon. This poem was dedicated by Degermann to Johannes Arvidi Backman “*ob pietatem & eruditionem nec non communem patriam, amicam constantem*” when Backman defended a “pneumatic dissertation” on the subject of the “disputant angel” (*angelus disputans*) at the University of Turku in

⁹ Published in: *Dissertatione pneumatica, angelum disputantem. Sub Præsidio ... Gabriel Juslenii. Resp. Johannes Arv[idi] Backman.* 24/9 1704. Pg. (10+) 46 (+4); in the Doria repository <<https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/51601/fv12680.pdf?sequence=1>>.

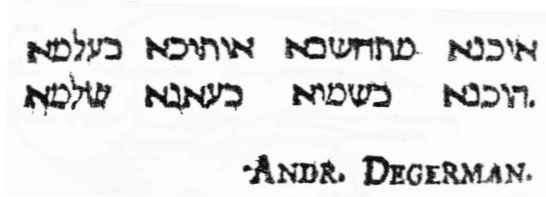
1704. The *praeses* of the dissertation was Professor of Logices et Metaphysices Gabriel Juslenius (1666–1724), who would later be appointed as Rector of the University and Professor of Theology.

'aykano maloko tar'ito hawo
 l-ahrone 'etmolko wa-şbuṭo šewo
 hode ba-drošo be-maloke doreš
 yehbat be-nuhro moğušo de-duko pareš
 rabeno Yuḥano Baḥmano rohem
 amino HNB' ḥurbono 'olem
 aloho ba-šmayo be-malayketo yoheb
 lok ṭobo mamlo wa-šlomo ṭayeb

How an angel demonstrated reflection,
 at last this has been consulted, and the matter was esteemed worthy.
 He disputes this in a disputation dealing with angels,
 which put in light a wise man (/magician) who interpreted [this] passage,
 [viz.] our master Yuḥano Baḥmano who loves (?).
 Trustworthy is the prophecy: the world is a ruin (?).
 God in the Heaven with the angelic host gives
 you a good word and He has prepared peace/welfare [for you].

The form and content of the poem raise numerous questions. It provides an example of a learned display of language, words and hints; and similar aspirations were highly appreciated by numerous authors also in other languages. For instance, YWHN' BHMN' is obviously a “Syriac” transformation of the respondent’s name Johannes Backman, while the Hebrew-looking word HNB' may perhaps refer to a prophecy (?). Hopefully the solution of these poetic enigmas delighted the addressees, too. It appears that neither the genders of nouns and the complements attached to them (şbuṭo šewo, etc.), nor their word order or patterns (e.g. 'etmolko, ṭobo mamlo), diminished Mr. Degermann’s creativity. It would be interesting to learn more of Degermann’s linguistic intentions. As for the peculiarities, again we have to keep in mind the difficulties of the printers, who did not know Semitic languages, of course, but were obliged to try to imitate the hand-written drawings of the authors.

TEXT 5



Four years later in 1708, Andreas Degermann published another Syriac poem (Vallinkoski No. 3846),¹⁰ this time in honour of Ericus Falander (1682–1747), who at the University of Turku in 1708 defended a disputation dealing with the aeons and *cogitationes sistens* in them. Falander was *Philosophia Candidatus* and minister in “Gamble Carleby” (Kokkola) on the western coast of Finland and later in Liminka (near the city of Oulu). Professor of Mathematics Laurentius Tammelin (1669–1733) was his *praeses* in the disputation. The rhythmic poem consists of only two lines printed in Hebrew characters. Hopefully Rev. Falander knew Aramaic well enough to keep reciting the poem in the fields of Ostrobothnia, his home province!

Aykano meṭḥašbo itayko be-‘olmo
 hukano ba-šmayo bo‘e-no šelomo

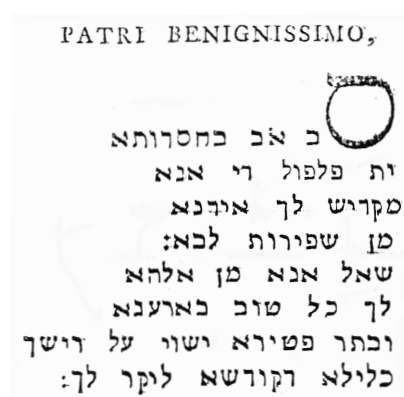
Like you are esteemed in the world,
 likewise in Heaven I pray for peace [for you].

The erroneous *waw* in *hukano* testifies to the Western Syriac pronunciation of *zəqafa* (the originally long *a*) in Degermann’s Syriac. And the non-Syriac suffix *-ko* in *itayko* represents a case of poetic licence characteristic of numerous other Semitic texts.

¹⁰ Published in: Schediasma historico-philologicum, breves de æonibus sistens cogitationes. Resp. Ericus Falander. 11/6 1708. Pg. (12+) 72.

TEXT 6

I promised to present six texts in Syriac. The sixth one was written in 1651 by Enevald Svenonius (1617–1688). Born in Annersta, Sweden, he was a student of the University of Turku, where he would go on to become Professor of Eloquence and Theology. Aside from this Syriac blessing (*beatitudino*), he wrote blessings in Hebrew, Chaldaic, Arabic, Greek, Latin, German and Finnish, all of them for the funeral of Baron Carl Carlsson Gyllenhielm (1574–1650), a well-known Maecenas connected with the Royal Court of Sweden.¹¹ However, no extant copy of this commemorative publication is known to exist today (Melander No. 271 & SKB 3668).



As recompense for this loss I would like to add the most recent Aramaic poem included in my material. As *praeses* for Gabriel Fortelius' (1785–1857, later Minister of the parish of Sauvo, near Turku) disputation dealing with a treatise by Maimonides, *Philosophiae Magister* Henricus Arenius (1780–1818) wrote an Aramaic poem in 1807, in honour of his father Johannes Arenius, *Magister* and the Minister of the parish of Mietoinen, also near Turku (Vallinkoski No. 192).¹² Linguistically speaking, the poem does not deviate considerably from Syriac. I have the feeling that such a poem represents the kind of best wishes that every recipient of congratulation in this time period would have liked to receive from his friends and colleagues:

¹¹ Published in: [Octo beatitudines in funere Caroli Gyldenhielm expositas carmine hebraeo, chaldaico, syriaco, arabico, graeco, latino, germanico, finnonico, cum explicatione suetica ... Enevaldus Svenonius. Upsaliae: excudit Eschil. an. 1651].

¹² Published in: Diss. academica, tractatum R. Maimonidis de sepultura animalium, veteribus Hebraeis usitata, breviter enucleans. Resp. Gabriel Fortelius. 26/3 1807. Pg. (2+) 16; in the Doria repository <www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/52186/fv01449.pdf?sequence=1>.

sab, ab, bē-ḥisduta
yaṭ pilpul di-ēna
maqdiš laḵ 'iddana
min šappirūṭ libba.
ša'el-na min ʔlaha
laḵ kol ṭub bē-ar'ana
u-ḅaṭar pēṭira yešawwi 'al rišaḵ
kēlila dē-quḏša l-iqar laḵ.

Accept, Father, with grace,
this essay which I
consecrate to you at this moment
with the heart's loveliness.
I pray to God
for all the best on our earth for you.
And after the passing away, may He put on your head
the holy crown for the glory of yours.

* * *

I dedicated the first version of this article to my highly esteemed friend, Academician Professor Konstantin Tsereteli, and read it at the International Semitological Conference held in honour of his 80th birthday in Tbilisi in 14–16 May 2001. In the collection of the papers of the Conference, which appeared in 2003, my contribution was erroneously replaced by another of my articles (Harviainen 2003). However, this information (as well as the collection) did not reach me before the spring of 2010, when Professor Ana Kharanauli (Tbilisi) was able to direct me accordingly. Thus, the article has waited many years for publication. When searching for a theme for the Festschrift of my friend, Professor Klaus Karttunen, the destiny of Syriac poems occurred to me. Knowing of Professor Karttunen's extensive interest in the history of Oriental studies, I dared to propose to the editor of this book, Dr. Bertil Tikkanen, the "revival" of these congratulations in honour of another colleague. It is our joint wish that this revised paper will be interpreted as homage shared by two excellent scholars and friends.

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