

ARAM Fourteenth Conference
Antioch and Edessa
Rhodes House, University of Oxford, 12–14 July 1999

BAS TER HAAR ROMENY, UNIVERSITY OF LEIDEN

- [1] ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian studies held its fourteenth conference at Oxford University on 12–14 July 1999. The convener was Dr. Shafiq AbouZayd, who must be congratulated on the great success of this conference. He succeeded not only in securing a magnificent venue, Rhodes House, but also in gathering a diverse and interesting group of scholars at a moment that other important conferences (the American Syriac Symposium and the Oxford Patristic Conference) were likely to take the wind out of his sails. I am sure that I speak for all participants if I say that this was a truly wonderful occasion.
- [2] The conference started with a paper by Dr. Daphna V. Arbel entitled “Junction of Tradition in Edessa: Possible Interaction between Mesopotamian Mythological and Jewish Mystical Traditions in the First Centuries CE.” This fascinating theme was followed by a paper on Antioch in South Arabian Tradition by Dr. Serguei A. Frantsouzoff, read in his absence by Dr. Nikolaj Serikoff. After the coffee break, Dr. Hans Erbes showed us how variants in the Peshitta tradition could be presented in relation to the readings of the Syro-Hexapla and other versions, using examples from the first five chapters of the book of Joshua. In the following paper, Prof. Catherine Saliou brought us back to Antioch; she discussed the myths and stories regarding its foundation.
- [3] The last session of 12 July was devoted to results of archeological work: Dr. Grégoire Poccardi and Mr. Jacques Leblanc reported on the retrieval of the location of the Olympic stadium of Daphne, and Mr. Alain Desreumaux presented a number of unpublished inscriptions that were found by a Turkish-French expedition to sites on the Euphrates near the Syrian border. One of them, a cave-tomb inscription from Apamea (opposite Zeugma), should be considered the westernmost inscription in Old Syriac found so far. It is dated 503 (of the Seleucid era; 191 CE) [Drijvers-Healey Add 1]. Next to this inscription a more recent text refers to the restoration of the tomb. Its date, 155, is ambiguous, Desreumaux explained: should we read this as (1)155 of the

Seleucid era, 155 of the Hijra, or perhaps 155 of the era of Edessa Antoniana Colonia? The last option is also a possibility, he suggested, in the case of another unpublished inscription, which is dated 37. The conventional solution is to understand this as (5)37 of the Seleucid era.

- [4] The first two lectures in the morning of 13 July were devoted to Syriac chronicles. Dr. Muriel Debié discussed the role of city archives in the formation of the various chronicles. Quite a lot is known about the practice of record keeping in Edessa, we have some indications with regard to Amida, but the situation in Nisibis remains unclear. The different forms in which we find material that may stem from the Edessa city archives in chronicles, point to the fact that each chronicler, though following a predecessor, still made his own work, using documents from archives in the way he considered most useful. Dr. Witold Witakowski spoke about “The Chronicle of Eusebius, its Genre and Continuations in Syriac.” He stressed the importance of Eusebius’ *Chronicon* for Syriac chronicle writing. In establishing whether a chronicle follows this example, one should look both at its form and at its content, he explained while giving a survey of Syriac chronicles.

- [5] The convener himself had chosen the topic “The Untamed Violence of Syrian Ascetics: a Study of the Problem of Violence and Killing in the Liber Graduum.” It seems that ascetics could act violently towards pagans, but were not always peaceful among themselves either. Even more trouble was brought to us in the next paper, in which Dr. Ephrem Yousif told us how Edessa and Antioch were struck by locusts, famine, pestilence, war, and earthquakes according to Syriac chronicles. Recording of these sad events kept the memory of them alive, but may have had a moral purpose as well, he explained. Dr. Yousif also told us some of his own recollections from his childhood, making clear that locusts and other disasters happened not only in the period covered by the chronicles he discussed.

- [6] After lunch, Dr. Sebastian Brock dealt with the impact of Hellenism on Syriac, taking material from two authors from Edessa, Ephrem and Narsai. He warned us that Ephrem should not be seen as “purely Semitic,” as the influence of Hellenism had already spread beyond Edessa before his time. After Ephrem, however, an increase of Greek influence can be seen, culminating in the seventh century. An indication of the scale of Hellenising

can be found in the use of loan-words (as opposed to temporary borrowings) in the poetry of the two authors just mentioned. Some phenomena should simply be attributed to differences in taste, but that does not alter the fact that a diachronic development can indeed be discerned. The scholarly programme of the day was closed by Prof. Michel van Esbroeck with an eminent discourse on Peter the Fuller and Cyrus of Edessa. After this, all participants were invited to the conference banquet offered by the sponsors Mr. and Mrs. Arbela.

- [7] The last day of the conference started with Dr. Erica Hunter's lecture on an example of the transmission of Greek scientific knowledge. In Cambridge ms. Mm. 6.29 the more original (*vis-à-vis* the copies in the British Library) Syriac version of Zosimus is found. Book 6 deals with the chemical problem of making alloys. The only known recipe for making Corinthian bronze is found in this text. Together with metallurgical specialists, Dr. Hunter had been able to find the right understanding of several instances where the specialized content and vocabulary (full of Greek scientific terms) had made interpretation impossible until now. The first editor, Berthelot, had been unable to translate the whole text for this reason. Equally ground-breaking was Dr. Klaus-Peter Todt's paper on "Antioch and Edessa in the so-called Treaty of Deabolis/Devol (September 1108):" an area that seems to have been neglected by Syriacists.

- [8] Prof. Nicola Ziadeh then discussed "Dawood al-Antaki (David of Antioch) in Arab History" and Dr. Carsten-Michael Walbiner informed us on "The City of Antioch in the Writings of Macarius ibn Azza'im (17th century)." The last paper of the conference was given by Dr. Nikolaj Serikoff on "Patriarch Gregory al-Haddad and his Gift to Nicholas II, the Emperor of Russia," about the Christian Arabic manuscripts preserved in the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies.

- [9] The papers will be published in the ARAM periodical.