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# ***Linguistic traditions in contact: Knowledge circulation and exchange from Athens to Baghdad***

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## BOOKLET OF ABSTRACTS

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## ***Synetheia* in Greek linguistic thought: Perspectives on 'common usage' between Hellenistic grammar, Imperial Atticism, and Byzantine erudition**

Federica BENUZZI – Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

The idea of *synetheia* (συνήθεια, 'common [linguistic] usage') is inherently multifaceted: it can refer to the everyday usage of uneducated people, but also to the language of the educated élites, as well as to the usage of ancient canonical authors. This label's semantic versatility is attested throughout the history of Greek, since the concept of *συνήθεια* dates back to the very origins of Greek linguistic thought. In my paper, I will provide a survey of how this concept evolved through the many different stages of Greek linguistic theorisation, starting with the beginning of linguistic studies in the Hellenistic period, moving on to the puristic movement of Imperial Atticism, the grammatical works of Late Antiquity, and ending with the lexica of the Byzantine period. This survey will highlight aspects of continuity and divergence in the use of the label *συνήθεια* across the centuries-long history of Greek linguistic theorisation.

## Ibn al-Muqaffa‘’s *Kitāb al-Manṭiq*: Between Alexandrian logic and Iraqi grammar?

Dmitry DUNDUA, Kevin Austin BUTTS – Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia / ALiDiM

*Kitāb al-Manṭiq*, a logical handbook from the mid-eighth century attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, covering Porphyry’s *Isagoge* and Aristotle’s *Categories*, *On Interpretation* and *Prior Analytics* up to 1.7, is our earliest attested instance of reception of Peripatetic logic in Arabic. Standing within the Alexandrian tradition of Aristotelian commentary, the text displays particularly significant continuities—from overall structure and compositional technique to specific textual parallels—with several Syriac works from that tradition.

At the same time, a host of peculiar features suggest that the text was not a simple translation or compilation of existing sources. We focus on a number of idiosyncrasies in the model of predication as it is developed in the sections of the *Manṭiq* covering *On Interpretation*. The theory of proposition developed in this Aristotelian treatise was subject to rather minute analyses in Alexandrian commentaries in Greek and Syriac beginning with Ammonius Hermiae (ca. 435/445-517/526). Reading the handbook against several such commentaries, we highlight both convergences between them, as well as interesting cases of divergence. We discuss divergences in light of ‘two-tier’ predication models reconstructed for contemporary, pre-canonical (“Old Iraqi”) Arabic grammar. Finally, we speculate on interpretations of this data, in light both of other peculiarities of the *Manṭiq*, and of the vexed question of Greek influence on the development of linguistic sciences in Arabic.

## Elias of Nisibis: An 11th-century polymath transmitting knowledge and bridging cultures

Bishara EBEID – Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

This paper examines the intellectual legacy of Elias, the East-Syrian Metropolitan of Nisibis (975–1046), a polymath whose extensive scholarly output encompassed theology, philosophy, linguistics, ethics, and the sciences. Particular attention is given to his intercultural and interfaith engagement with Muslim intellectuals, especially as documented in the *Book of Sessions* and in his *Correspondence* with the vizier Abū al-Qāsim al-Maghribī in 1027. These exchanges reflect not only a spirit of respectful dialogue, but also Elias's adept use of Islamic theological terminology (*kalām*).

Moreover, by examining several of his other works—including the *Book on Dispelling Anxiety*, the *Treatise on Weights and Measures*, and the *Arabic–Syriac Lexicon*—the paper investigates how Elias's writings served as a medium for transmitting and integrating diverse forms of knowledge. His texts reveal a deliberate effort to connect the Greek and Syriac intellectual heritages—both pagan and Christian—with the Arabic–Islamic tradition, thereby fostering continuity and dialogue between different epistemic worlds. Through these works, Elias emerges as a conscious mediator and synthesizer of knowledge across religious and linguistic boundaries.

By situating, finally, Elias within the wider networks of knowledge exchange in the Abbasid intellectual world, the paper highlights how his polymathic profile and cross-cultural orientation transcend rigid disciplinary and religious divides. His corpus offers a compelling case study in comparative knowledge transmission and adaptation, shedding new light on the dynamic interplay of scholarly traditions in the medieval Middle East.

## The reception of Greek grammatical theory in 9th cent. Syriac culture

Margherita FARINA – CNRS UMR7597 Histoire des théories linguistiques

The Syriac grammatical theory largely depends on the Greek model, deriving both from the logic and from the grammatical tradition. The logic section of the Aristotelian *Organon*, according to its Neoplatonic reception, as well as the basic notions contained in the *Techne Grammatike* were adapted into Syriac between the 6th and the 7th cent. However, the movement of assimilation and re-elaboration of Greek knowledge was not achieved once and for all in this period. In particular, Syriac grammatical production, if appropriately questioned, witnesses of a progressive penetration of terms and notions from the Greek *Techne* also at later stages in the tradition. 9<sup>th</sup> century seems to be a turning point in this process. To this century dates the earliest complete copy of the Syriac translation of the *Techne*, preserved in London BL Add 14620, a manuscript displaying several Hellenizing features. In this communication, I will try to point at the peculiarities of this copy, both in terms of grammatical content and of codicological features. Moreover, I will set the information that can be drawn from the analysis of this copy within the broader context of the renewed interest in Greek language, that characterized the Syriac-Orthodox milieu at the Byzantine-Islamic frontier in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. As I will try to argue, a number of features of the version preserved in BL Add 14620, which were so far interpreted as archaic, could instead be regarded as the marks of an attempt at going back to the sources. Finally, a few of other Syriac grammatical sources datable to the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. will be examined, testifying of indirect access to the contents of portions of the Greek *Techne*, for which we do not have a Syriac translation, nor indirect evidence of its existence.

## **Grammarians in dialogue?**

### **Forms and functions of the dialogic pattern in grammatical literature**

Antonella GHERSETTI – Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

Speculative and pedagogical discourses are often employed by the same authors in different works, depending on the text's audience and purpose, like in the case of the speculative discourse in *al-Īdāh* (argumentation), and the educational discourse in *al-Ġumal* (presentation of grammar in a concise and clear manner), both by al-Zaġġaġī (d. c. 337-340/948–950). In *al-Īdāh fī 'Ilal al-Nahw*, a milestone of linguistic literature and a work of a highly speculative nature, dialogue permeates the text as a structuring form. This dialogic pattern, which probably originates from Greece, echoes academic disputes of intellectual circles of that period. My presentation investigates the different representations and functions of dialogue in *al-Īdāh*, where three modes of representation are visible: a mimetic mode staging real dialogues that would have taken place between grammarians, a mimetic mode in which dialogue takes place between speakers devoid of any identity, a diegetic-hybrid mode where the discourse takes the form of a narrative reproducing the sequences of a dialogue. The sequences reflecting the author's actual experience, or representing a dialogue presented as historical, are not in the majority, and the dialogue represents rather a mental space without any referential anchoring. As a consequence, the dialogic form, abstracted from any grounding in reality, is rather a means to present a discourse confined to a single speaker (little more than a monologue) and can be seen as a stylistic device with a heuristic value in consolidating knowledge.

## **The Syriac version of the *Téchnē grammatikē* Translating Greek compounds and the question of Arabic reception**

Valentina B. LANZA – Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata

The paper examines the processes of transmission and re-elaboration of grammatical terminology across the Greek, Syriac, and Arabic traditions, with particular attention to the role of Syriac mediation and to the interaction between linguistic and philosophical knowledge. Focusing on the early Abbasid period, it situates the development of grammatical terminology within the broader context of the translation movement and the circulation of Greek philosophical texts. Particular attention is devoted to the interaction between Syriac and Arabic learned traditions and to the role of translators active in Baghdad in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, especially Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn, whose work contributed to the formation of a technical lexicon in Arabic, particularly in the field of logic, through processes of translation, revision, and terminological stabilization.

Against this background, the paper focuses on a specific case study, namely the notion of “nominal composition”, whose designation exhibits a remarkable terminological convergence across Greek ὄνομα σύνθετον, Syriac *šmā m̄arakābā*, and Arabic *ism murakkab*.

This alignment calls for discussion, since Arabic grammatical thought is generally considered to have developed largely independently from Greek and Syriac traditions, including with regard to metalinguistic terminology. To account for this convergence, the paper situates the discussion within the broader framework of intellectual exchanges between the Greek, Syriac, and Arabic worlds in Late Antiquity, from the Syriac translation of the *Téchnē grammatikē* in the sixth century to the composition of Ibn al-Sarrāj’s *Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* in the tenth century, by which time the term *murakkab* appears to have become established as the standard designation for nominal composition in Arabic grammatical terminology.

Within this framework, the paper argues that the use of the term *murakkab* in Arabic grammatical treatises can be understood as an extension into the grammatical domain of a term already current in other fields of knowledge, especially in contexts characterized by a strong drive toward formalization and theoretical systematization, such as the natural sciences and logic. More specifically, the paper seeks to demonstrate that it is best understood in relation to the logical lexicon and the Near Eastern translations of the Aristotelian *Organon*. From this perspective, Syriac emerges not only as a language of transmission, but as an active site of conceptual elaboration, in which terminological equivalences are defined and subsequently integrated into learned Arabic discourse.

## What's "Common Greek"? Some observations on *Koinon* in the history of Greek

Chiara MONACO – Universiteit Gent

The concept of *koinon* ("Common Greek") has played a central role in the long process of codification of both Ancient and, later, vernacular Greek. In antiquity, particularly within grammatical and lexicographical traditions associated with purist movements, *koinon* was often defined in opposition to Attic Greek (Monaco 2024). In the modern period, however, during debates over the status of vernacular Greek, the notion of a "common language" was strategically used to defend the vernacular against archaising positions, which dismissed contemporary Greek as fragmented into dialects and therefore unsuitable as a national language (Vincent 2009; Pantelidis 2024).

Against this background, the present paper re-examines the concept of *koinon* across different historical stages of Greek. It argues that a comparative perspective - drawing in particular on the histories of Italian and Arabic - can help clarify how "common language" is constructed, contested, and instrumentalised in the processes of linguistic standardisation. By situating Greek within a broader cross-linguistic framework, the paper seeks to refine our understanding of *koinon* as both a descriptive and ideological category.

Monaco, C. 2024. The idea of 'common Greek' (κοινόν); a revaluation of Moeris' Atticist lexicon. *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 102, 36-78.

Pantelidis, N. 2024. Sta ichni tis neoellinikis koinis: i martyria ton grammatikon tou 19ou-archon tou 20ou ai. In Tzitzilis & Papanastasiou (eds.). *Koini, koines kai i diamorfosi tis koinis neoellinikis* 3, 295-312.

Vincent, A. 2009. Finding 'the common tongue'. In Carpinato & Tribulato (eds.). *Storia e storie della lingua greca*, 99-132. Venezia.

## **In and out of monasteries: Syriac intellectual knowledge in Baghdad (9<sup>th</sup> century)**

Mara NICOSIA – Università degli Studi di Padova

Syriac Christian intellectuals played a crucial role in translating Greek science and philosophy into Arabic. When the Abbasids came to power, Syriac-speaking Christians were called to action, alongside other groups (e.g., Zoroastrian Persians), to translate the “wisdom of the Greeks”, from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Although the role of translators played by Syriac Christians has now been widely recognised in scholarship, almost nothing is known about the education these intellectuals received, which enabled them to hold prestigious intellectual positions in Abbasid Iraq.

The talk focuses on the shift from the "fully-fledged" Syriac monastic schools of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries to a didactic setup developed around prominent teachers in Baghdad, organised in ateliers or circles. Taking the 9<sup>th</sup> century as its focus, and starting from a new notion of *schooling*, the talk addresses the transmission of ideas in and around Baghdad, the development of technical vocabularies as a consequence of shared translating practices, and the evolution of schools and teaching practices to fit the needs of times (and patrons). This approach will ultimately help shedding new light on the social and intellectual setup of Syriac intellectuals in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

## ***Samāʿ* as a practice of knowledge production and circulation in Arabic linguistic scholarship**

Simona OLIVIERI – Università Ca' Foscari Venezia / ALiDiM

Classical Arabic linguistic scholarship developed through interlocking practices (e.g., data collection, audition, validation, and debate) that collectively transformed dispersed speech into authoritative bodies of knowledge. This paper examines these dynamics through the lens of scholarly practice, focusing on *samāʿ* (aural transmission) as a structuring epistemic principle operating across the production, circulation, and validation of linguistic knowledge.

At the level of production, linguistic data were gathered through listening (to informants, reciters, and transmitted texts) with preference given to speakers associated with *faṣāḥa* ('eloquence') and to forms deemed reliable. Crucially, *samāʿ* here is not passive reception; rather, what is "heard" is already filtered, selected, and evaluated. Reported usage is accepted as evidence only when it meets criteria of trustworthiness, attestation, and conformity to recognized norms. As a result, the corpus is effectively shaped at or prior to the moment of audition. In this sense, hearing functions simultaneously as a mode of collection and as an initial stage of validation.

This logic extends into broader epistemic structures. As in the *ʿisnād* system of *ḥadīth* transmission, linguistic authority depends on the reliable transmission of instances through recognized and trustworthy channels. These practices are further sustained within structured intellectual networks in which teacher–student genealogies and peer relationships serve as markers of epistemic authority. At the level of circulation, *samāʿ* continues to operate through controlled forms of orality (such as lectures, dictation, and recitation before teachers), which function as mechanisms of verification and correction. Knowledge is not only transmitted but also actively received and revalidated.

Taken together, these dimensions demonstrate that "what is heard" is not a subsidiary methodological tool but a central organizing principle of linguistic knowledge. *Samāʿ*-based practices inform how data are collected, how they circulate, and how they are authenticated.

## Every verse you quote: Qur'ānic usage across early Arabic scholarly traditions

Raffaele Michele SELICATO, Salvatore Simone TERMINI – Università Ca' Foscari Venezia / ALiDiM

In the early Islamic era (1st/7th to 4th/10th centuries), the Qur'ān played a central role in the emergence and development of Arabic intellectual disciplines. Early Arabic scholars utilized the Qur'ānic text both as a source and an object of study. Our paper examines the way in which a number of Qur'ānic verses were used and discussed by early Arabic scholars belonging to intellectual fields that are ostensibly far removed from each other. We first focus on our earliest sources in linguistic disciplines and explore the authoritative role of the Qur'ānic text in the development of the very idea of Arabic language and its incipient codification. We then move to law and exegesis, two a priori 'non-linguistic' disciplines, to look at cases where the interpretation of particular Qur'ānic verses includes—and sometimes hinges on—discussions of the linguistic aspects of the text.

Our paper builds on a comparative analysis of a case study from seminal primary sources belonging to different disciplines: on the one hand, Sibawayhi's (d. 180/796) *Kitāb*, the cornerstone of Arabic grammatical theory, and al-Farrā's (d. 207/822) *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, a pivotal contribution to Qur'ānic linguistic exegesis; on the other, al-Šāfi'ī's (d. 204/820) *Kitāb al-'umm*, fundamental in the development of Islamic legal theory and jurisprudence, and al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) *Ġāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, one of the earliest and most influential comprehensive Qur'ānic commentaries. Our main objective is to determine whether common methodological patterns and strategies might be recognizable behind discipline-specific arguments, intentions and interpretations. This double perspective will shed light on the early development of Islamic scholarly activity and will hopefully contribute to our understanding of the (often obscure) processes of interaction between Arabic sciences in their formative age.

## **Arabic scholars in Constantinople**

### **The role of Byzantine manuscripts in the 9th-century Arabic translation movement**

Jakub SYPIAŃSKI – Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

The Arabic translation movement — the systematic rendering of Greek scientific and philosophical texts into Arabic — is usually studied from within Baghdad. This paper redirects attention westward, to Constantinople, and asks: how did Greek manuscripts actually reach the translators? I argue that direct acquisition missions to the Byzantine capital constituted one of the primary channels through which Arabic scholars obtained the texts they translated, and that these missions were more frequent, better organised, and better documented than scholarship has so far acknowledged.

The starting point is the famous narrative in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*: al-Ma'mūn, inspired by a dream of Aristotle, exchanges letters with the Roman emperor and dispatches a team — al-Ḥaġġāġ ibn Maṭar, Ibn al-Biṭrīq, Salmān of the *bayt al-ḥikma*, and others — to collect manuscripts from Byzantine territory. Previous scholarship has treated this episode either as propaganda or as a curiosity. I argue instead that it is historically plausible and historically significant. The narrative is corroborated by a network of independent anecdotal evidence: a joke by Yūḥannā ibn Māsawayh revealing his intimate familiarity with Constantinople and Amorion; a critique of Ibn al-Biṭrīq for knowing only Byzantine minuscule; Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's own descriptions of contemporary Byzantine purple codices; and the Banū Mūsā's detailed account of two successive acquisition missions to Constantinople for the *Conics* of Apollonius of Perga.

A second axis concerns the relationship between Byzantine manuscript copying and Arabic demand. Building on — and critically reassessing — the hypothesis of Dimitri Gutas, I argue that for a significant subset of ninth-century Greek scientific manuscripts, the evidence suggests Byzantine copies were made for the translators: some as diplomatic gifts from Emperor Theophilos to al-Ma'mūn, others purchased by Ḥunayn or the Banū Mūsā on their visits to Constantinople.

## ***Baṭḥ Qaʿr* and *ʿIdḡāʿ*: Uncovering regional vowel terminology from the *Qirāʿāt* literature**

Marijn VAN PUTTEN – Universiteit Leiden

This paper looks at the grammatical terminology as it is used in the literature that studies the Quranic variant readings (*qirāʿāt*) literature.

It is well-known that the early Basran and Kufan grammarians used slightly different terminology to refer to inflectional and non-inflectional vowels. Sībawayh keeps a strict distinction between the non-inflectional (*fath, kasr, damm, waqf*) and inflectional (*naṣb, ḡarr, rafʿ, ḡazm*) vowels, whereas al-Farrāʿ freely uses the inflectional terms (*naṣb, ḥafḍ, rafʿ, ḡazm*) for non-inflectional vowels (but not *vice-versa*).

While it is generally believed that the Basran system wins out, and the Kufan system disappears, I will show that in the *qirāʿāt* literature the two systems are in competition. Where the Andalusī scholars of the discipline generally employ the Basran system (although using *ḥafḍ* besides *ḡarr* for inflectional *i*), the Baghdādī scholars continue to employ the Kufan system well into the 5th century AH.

Besides these two general systems there is yet a third system. This is attributed by al-Ḥuwārizmī to Sībawayh’s teacher al-Ḥalīl b. ʿAḥmad, who is attributed to have used a complex set of terms depending on where in the word a certain vowel occurs. Using exotic terms such as *qaʿr, ʿidḡāʿ, naḡr, ḥaṣw, tawḡīh, tawqīf, nabr* and *ʿirsāl*.

The issue with this terminological system attributed to al-Ḥalīl, however, is that he does not appear to use this term in his own *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, and for this reason there is serious reason to doubt that the attribution of the system to him is valid. However, the description of al-Ḥuwārizmī is not our only known source for these terms. Here, again, *qirāʿāt* literature gives us vital insights into this system. Al-Dānī in his monumental *Ḡāmiʿ al-bayān* frequently cites verbatim from (otherwise lost) 3rd c. AH *qirāʿāt* works and when he does so he reproduced the grammatical terminology they use. In such citations the “Pseudo-Ḥalīlian” terms such as *qaʿr, ʿidḡāʿ, tawqīf, nabr*, and *ʿirsāl* occur frequently along with other terms not recorded by al-Ḥuwārizmī, such as *baṭḥ, qabw*.

In this paper I will examine these terms, and what they represent in the literature as cited in the *Ḡāmiʿ al-bayān* and I will show that the systems that underlie these terms can be traced back to distinct sets of grammatical terminology from 2nd-3rd c. AH Fustat and Medina otherwise lost to time.