

## Assyria and Syria: Synonyms?\*

Johny Messo

### 1. Introduction

In 1992, Prof. R.N. Frye published an article in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (hereafter JNES; 51:4, 281-285). Several years later it was reprinted in the *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Studies* (hereafter JAAS; 11:2 [1997], 30-36) and provided with a short postscript. On April 24, 1999, Frye gave a [lecture](#) about the topic of his paper that appeared earlier in the JNES and the JAAS. The article and the lecture were titled “Assyria and Syria: Synonyms.”<sup>1</sup>

Some features presented by Frye as facts are favored and championed within the nationalistic spheres of Syriacs<sup>2</sup> who claim that they are the direct descendants of the ancient Assyrians; these aspects have made inroads into the general public consciousness too. Not coincidentally, Frye explained in a postscript that back in 1992 he was not “interested in the modern political questions which are an entirely different subject” (JAAS, 1997:36). In his [response](#) to [John Joseph](#) in 1999, Frye added that he wrote his original article “in answer to the assertion that the word Syria was an ancient Egyptian word” (JAAS, 1999:70). If this indeed would be the case, I do not believe that Prof. Joseph would have written his critique; at least I would not. Frye continued that he “did not realize the hornets’ nest of modern Assyrian disputes which arose.” His unawareness of this controversial issue is hard to swallow. He must have known this, because he had read Joseph’s book. And, after all, he was married to an eager ‘Assyrian’.

Frye purported to have discussed a linguistic theory, but he also entered into a historical discussion and in this regard he chose to omit important facts. His views are espoused and proclaimed by and among (ill-informed) Syriacs who view themselves as ‘modern Assyrians’. The need for a counter article to fill the *gap of facts* has grown since recently after I noticed several attacks on Syriacs who do not believe that their people has an Assyrian pedigree.

In brief, Frye’s article (starting with the title) draws a misleading, superficial and simplistic conclusion. Furthermore, he has omitted substantial facts in his essay. My intention, therefore, is to provide the reader with solid background information and add some historical facts that Frye has left out. In all honesty, his essay pictures only half of the whole truth.

### 2. General remarks concerning the article of Prof. Frye

Before all, it is worth noting that Frye’s explicit title already anticipates his end conclusion. Upon reading his article, or similar studies on the origin of the word ‘Syria(n)’, the reader should consider the next observation: “Confusion has existed between the two similar words ‘Syria’ and ‘Assyria’ throughout history almost down to our own day” (JNES, 1992:281).

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\* This is a reedited version of an article that originally appeared in *Bahro Suryoyo* Nos. 1-3 (2001).

<sup>1</sup> Upon proofreading my essay, a friend referred me to a critique written by Prof. [John Joseph](#), who had already written a similar reply to Professor Frye. Ironically, Joseph’s article carried exactly the same title as my paper. Frye’s response, which makes pathetic reading, appeared in [JAAS](#) 13:1 (1999), 69f. Besides Frye’s two conclusions (JNES, 1992:284), where Joseph focused himself on, Joseph tackled some of Frye’s arguments, which are also scrutinized in the present writing. Our conclusions may overlap each other in certain instances, even though both Joseph and I have used quite different sources in a few cases.

<sup>2</sup> This name is in widespread use nowadays and is used interchangeably with ‘Syrian’ in this paper.

But note that this difficult subject, which has caused a lot of misunderstanding, evidently also “down to our own day,” is treated in nearly four to five pages. Given this complexity, one might have expected from Frye a fuller account of the theories on the derivation of ‘Syria’. But he did not. Nor did he, as he claimed, seriously challenge the proposal of J.A. Tvedtnes.<sup>3</sup>

After I read Frye’s contribution, I wondered whether he has an elementary knowledge about Syriac-Aramaic literature at all or that he purposely did not mention some well-known facts. For these essentials would have surely contradicted some of his conclusions, as we shall see.

a) Frye (JNES:284) may have followed someone else’s transcription, because he transcribed the quotation of a West-Syriac church father (Mor Michael, d.1199) as follows: “the names of peoples who possessed writing, among them are ‘twry’ **d hywn swryy**’.” It rather should be ‘twry’ **d-hnwn swryy**’. Cf. the Syriac text (p. 17) of Chabot’s edition.<sup>4</sup>

b) Based on Mor Michael’s cited remark, Frye commented: “This book by a learned native speaker shows the continuous equating of the terms ‘Syrian’ and ‘Assyrian’ for many Eastern Christians” (JNES, 1992:284). If, however, he was better informed about Syriac literature, Frye would have known that his conclusion is not valid. Instead, there is a continuous awareness of equating the term ‘Syrian’ with ‘Aramean’. Moreover, if there really would be a “continuous equating...for many Eastern Christians,” why did he merely quote *three words*? Seeking to prove his case, he quoted *but one quotation* from the entire corpus of Eastern Christian literature; the Syriac literature itself consists of more than thousands of manuscripts. Moreover, why did he not quote an *East-Syriac* writer as well to support his statement?

c) Finally, Frye should have studied the context of the citation in Michael’s account first, because his understanding of the quote betrays his own ignorance of the large chronicle (assuming that he has indeed read the citation itself instead of copying it from someone else). Furthermore, he probably has not read other verses of the same medieval author he cited. These clearly attest to an Aramean descent for the Syriac people; see the pages 7 and 748, to mention two, of the Syriac edition of Chabot. If Frye was aware of this fact, I wonder why he forgot to mention these pages also, because what is said by Mor Michael in these pages would contradict his end conclusion. The little information that I mentioned in this section, shows that Frye’s conclusion is not true at all: “This book by a learned native speaker shows the continuous equating of the terms ‘Syrian’ and ‘Assyrian’.”<sup>5</sup>

These are indeed very expensive mistakes which anyone who dares to write something on a difficult and delicate subject, cannot permit himself to make. Further, I would have found it interesting to ask Frye at the lecture about the many Syriac writers who expressly referred to themselves, their people and their language as ‘Aramean’ in late antiquity. For we do not find a word about the generally acknowledged Aramean descent of the Syriacs in Frye’s article, even though there are plenty of early Syriac sources for proving this point. At any rate, the early Syriac writers did not regard the names ‘Syria(n)’ and ‘Assyria(n)’ as synonyms. Instead, ‘Syria(n)’ and ‘Aram(ean)’ were regarded by them as equivalents.

<sup>3</sup> John A. Tvedtnes, “The origin of the Name ‘Syria’,” in *JNES* 40 (1981), 139-140.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also Frye’s Table 1, where we incorrectly read ‘abr hhr’, while it should have been ‘br nhrh (cf. the Bible book Ezra 4:10).

<sup>5</sup> I cannot fully agree with Joseph’s (JAAS, 1997:40) explanation of the quotation which was wrongly transcribed by Frye. I have studied this passage and in the future I may publish an article about it. Meanwhile, the quotation is elaborately discussed by D. Weltecke, *Die “Beschreibung der Zeiten” von Mor Michael dem Grossen (1126-1199): Eine Studie zu ihrem historischen und historiographiegeschichtlichen Kontext* (Louvain: Peeters, 2003), 222-232.

### 3. The etymology of the word 'Syria(n)'

Let me now shortly discuss important philological aspects that should be kept in mind while facing arguments such as disseminated in the article under review.

Frye's essay started with rejecting one of the at least seven theories I am aware of.<sup>6</sup> Although this paper does not allow us the space to treat in full the origin of the word 'Syria(n)', some essential remarks, with the Assyria(n) > Syria(n) theory in our mind, should suffice.

Frye insists that the word 'Syria' can be traced back to 'Assyria'. A linguistic theory, it should be noted, that was not invented by him. So his aim should be to enlighten our understanding, build upon his predecessors or add new evidence in support of this hypothesis. Remarkably, Frye failed to succeed in any of these areas. What is more, he utterly ignored the pioneers of this linguistic theory. Frye did not refer to valuable earlier studies, nor did he discuss them.

These earlier studies, we can add, are often misinterpreted by Assyrian minded nationalists. Let us take Th. Nöldeke (1836-1930), one of the greatest scholars of all time, as an example. Sometimes he is referred to as one of the advocates of the conjecture that 'Syria' linguistically stems from 'Assyria'. This is true. But to Nöldeke, the Greek term 'Syria(n)' was initially a "political-geographical" concept that, from the epoch of Alexander the Great on, was transformed into an "ethnic" notion and confined to the Aramean people.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Nöldeke at various places expounded that after their mass conversion to Christianity, the Aramean people themselves followed along and adopted the name 'Syria(n)' as their new self-designation.

#### *Logical Fallacy*

Frye, let it be clear, makes an illogical, fallacious argumentation. His reasoning goes beyond linguistic boundaries. He rearticulated the, one is inclined to say, outdated theory that the *term* 'Syria' linguistically may derive from 'Assyria'. On this conjecture he built his thesis, viz. that the *people* known as 'Syrians' are Assyrians in origin. Frye will not admit, in this case, that names can change semantically. That is, a word can lose its initial meaning and acquire a new one as time passes by due to, *inter alia*, historical, cultural, social and political factors.

Harvard scholar Heinrichs hit the nail on its head when he addressed this argument of "modern Assyrians": "the basic identity of the names does not necessarily imply the identity of the people(s) names by them."<sup>8</sup> True, the fact that the "modern Assyrians" have been known as 'Syrians' for nearly two millennia and that the two names, by accident, may have a linguistic connection, is not a convincing argument for the alleged original Assyrian identity.

Be that as it may, Frye seems to have found support in obscure quotations in Greek and Roman authors who seemingly understood the two names as synonyms. But here, too, Frye has ignored the generally known fact that in this particular case these writers out of confusion used the two words interchangeably (see below). In the JNES (1992) and in the JAAS (1999), Frye gives (too) much weight to the Greek historian Herodotus (fifth century B.C.), who

<sup>6</sup> Cf. A. Sauma "The origin of the Word Suryoyo-Syrian," in *The Harp* 6:3 (1993), 171-197.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. esp. Th. Nöldeke, "Assyrios Syrios Syros" in *Hermes: Zeitschrift für Classische Philologie* 5 (Berlin, 1871), 443-468. This classic study ends with the words that "Seit Alexander [the Great; ca. 331-330 B.C.], wenn nicht schon früher, hat man angefangen, den Namen der Syrer auf die in *Συρία* [Syria] vorherrschende Nationalität allein zu übertragen, und so ist dieser ursprünglich politisch-geographische Begriff zu einem ethnologischen geworden, der sich mit dem einheimischen 'Aramäer' deckte."

<sup>8</sup> W. Heinrichs, "The modern Assyrians – Name and Nation," in: R. Contini, F.A. Pennachietti, M. Tosco (eds.), *Semitica. Serta Philologica C. Tsereteli dicata* (Torino, 1993), 103.

appears as his main source. In the light of Herodotus 7.63, Frye concludes, very naive though, that the current Syriacs must be (the descendants of the ancient) Assyrians. In Herodotus (7.63) we read: “These people (Assyrians) were called Syrians by the Greeks, the name for them elsewhere being Assyrian” (Frye’s translation in JAAS, 1999:69).

From the classicist Macan, who edited, translated and commented on the books of Herodotus, we learn that “under this term [*Assyrioi*, the Assyrians] Hdt. may here intend to include (a) Assyrians properly so called, (b) Babylonians, and dwellers in Mesopotamia generally, (c) Syrians (Aramaicans) properly so called [*sic*].”<sup>9</sup> According to Van Groningen, the meaning of “Assyrios, Assyria” has to be understood, first, in its general meaning of “Mesopotamians” (cf. Hdt. 6.1: *Syrion*) and, secondly, in the special meaning of “Assyrians.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, Herodotus, in whose works the terms ‘Syrians’ and ‘Assyria’ are somewhat loosely used and which can denote various peoples, is not an authority for the assertion that the people who came to be known as ‘Syrians’ (cf. n. 7 and below) are the offspring of the ancient Assyrians. There is, of course, much more to say about Herodotus, and other classical writers for that matter. Some aspects have already lucidly been discussed by Joseph (cf. the cited literature).<sup>11</sup>

### *East & West*

There is another issue that we should bear in mind. It may, or may not, be plausibly argued that, linguistically, the appellative ‘Syria(n)’ is an abridged form of ‘Assyria(n)’ in the Greek language. In English, too, ‘Syria(n)’ and ‘Assyria(n)’ resemble each other. It is, therefore, not surprising that many have approached the two appellations from the supposition that they are, linguistically that is, related to each other. As is, indeed, the case in other ‘western’ languages, such as French, German, Dutch and even Armenian.

However, one should neither forget that this linguistic hypothesis, as it basically is, can *not* be maintained in the Aramaic or in the Hebrew language, where the two names appear in quite different forms. In Aramaic, for instance, the mother tongue of the carriers of the self-designation ‘Syrian’, they are accordingly. The common form *athuraya* (‘Assyrian’) has existed since pre-Christian times, whereas ‘Syrian’ in the Aramaic language, viz. *suryaya*, appears only in the post-Christian era.<sup>12</sup>

## 4. Other noteworthy aspects

### *Frye’s Table 1*

We have just seen how Frye applied the shift of the hypothetical word-development also to the basic identity of the people who, in a later period, happened to carry the name Syrians. Again, to my understanding, this way of reasoning is both unfounded and fallacious.

<sup>9</sup> R.W. Macan, *Herodotus, the seventh, eighth & ninth books with introduction, text, apparatus, commentary, appendices, indices, maps* (Macmillan and Co., 1908), 87.

<sup>10</sup> B.A. van Groningen, *Herodotus Commentaar* [Herodotus Commentary], boek [book] 1-9 (1946), 58 on Hdt. I 102.2. Cf. also Hdt. I 131.3 where Herodotus (mistakenly) reckons the Babylonians as ‘Assyrians’ as well.

<sup>11</sup> J. Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, & Colonial Powers* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 20-21 (esp. p. 21 n. 72).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Heinrichs, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 102ff. On p. 103, he describes, for example, how Mor Tuma Odo (1853-1918), lexicographer and since 1892 Chaldean Archbishop of Urmia (Iran), “suggested that one should return to the ‘original’ name *Ātōrāyē* to replace *Sūryāyē* (Surāyē).” Naturally this idea was welcomed and favoured among the ‘Assyrian’ nationalists. The issue whether or not this bishop had proposed this plan, is complex as well. In fact, we are dependent on a secondary source, produced by an ‘Assyrian’ nationalist after Mor Tuma’s death. Hence its reliability has been questioned. In any case, it is interesting to observe that Odo in his lexicon explains ‘Syria(n)’ and ‘Aramea(n)’ as synonyms, by which he stands in a much older tradition of Syriac lexicographers.

Similarly, we have discussed Frye's misinterpretation of Mor Michael above: "This book by a learned native speaker shows the continuous equating of the terms 'Syrian' and 'Assyrian' for many Eastern Christians." If there truly is more evidence to validate his views, we remarked, it is striking that Frye, as well as others who share his viewpoints, can not cite more examples from the entire corpus of Syriac literature. Let us have a look at his Table 1 (cf. n. 4, above).

If the 'Syrians', in accordance with Frye's "many Eastern Christians," would understand not only the words, but also the Assyrian and the Syrian people to be one and the same, then why did they call the "Mesopotamian area" in the Early Christian period "Beth Aramaye," i.e. "house/land of the Arameans"? (In point of fact, this area corresponds to ancient Babylonia.) Still, Frye believes that the Syrians are the descendants of the Assyrians based on the hypothetical assumption that the term 'Syria' was probably derived from 'Assyria' some 2,5 millennia ago. For this, he referred us to classical writers (see also below) who regarded the words Syrian and Assyrian as synonyms, apparently already in the early Christian era.

#### *"The Assyrian script"*

Prof. Frye further wrote that "The use of the term 'Assyrian' for the Aramaic language and alphabet is even found as late as the 6th century of our era..." (JNES, 1992:282). Much can be said about this subject, too. But for a proper understanding it will suffice to refer to the fine study of R.C. Steiner, which sheds more light on this issue, and quote some of his findings. "The Egyptians," he ascertained, "were far enough away and insular enough not to feel the need to distinguish Aram from Assyria." Steiner continues that this lack of interest in defining the true name of the script "may well have been introduced in the sixth century [B.C.] by Egyptians who had not the foggiest notion when the Aramaic script first received official status in Mesopotamia." He concludes that "it was the Egyptians who first applied the name of Assyria to Aram and the term 'Assyrian script' to the Aramaic script."<sup>13</sup>

Here, too, it was ignorance and confusion that caused uninterested, ill-informed and foreign people to call the Aramaic script – not its language (JAAS, 1997:43) – "Assyrian script." Should we attach any significance to the lack of knowledge of the Egyptians in our modern quest for the historical identity of the Syrians? I personally would not, but Frye seems to suggest that we should accept this misconception of the Egyptians as a cogent argument. The Jews, too, called their Aramaic adopted *script* 'Assyrian' (*ktav ashuri*). But this referred to geopolitical Assyria, where *Aramaic* had replaced Assyrian to become the new *lingua franca*.

#### *The Greeks and the Syriac/Aramean people*<sup>14</sup>

We have seen that the "Aramaic language [*sic*] and alphabet" (JNES, 1992:282) were termed as 'Assyrian' by the ancient Egyptians. This confusion also befell "at least some people in the East" (283), to whom the names 'Syria' and 'Assyria' were somehow identical in meaning.

As a matter of fact, "The Greeks have actually never known the name 'Arameans'<sup>15</sup>...The Greeks called the [Aramean] people 'Syrians'."<sup>16</sup> In this regard, I find it particularly interesting that on p. 282 of his JNES article Frye himself noted that "The Greeks never [but

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<sup>13</sup> R.C. Steiner, "Why the Aramaic script was called 'Assyrian' in Hebrew, Greek, and Demotic," in *Orientalia* 62 (1989), 80-82.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Joseph (JAAS, 1997:37-39) who used other sources. Yet, both of us draw the same conclusions.

<sup>15</sup> Except, for instance, Strabo (born c. 63 B.C.), who in all likelihood followed Posidonius (born c. 150 B.C.), and Josephus (c. 90 A.D.), as Nöldeke (see next footnote) notifies us.

<sup>16</sup> Th. Nöldeke, "Die Namen der aramäischen Nation und Sprache," in *ZDMG* 25 (1871), 113-131. Here p. 115: "Die Griechen haben den Namen 'Aramäer' nie eigentlich gekannt...Die Griechen nannten das Volk 'Syrier'."

cf. my n. 15 and Frye's rewording several years later (see below)] use the term 'Aramaic' or 'Aramaean' but only 'Syrian', while the ancient Hebrews did use the word Aram for Syria," and Arameans for Syrians as well as Aramaic for the Syrian tongue, one should add.

Remarkable are also his words from 1992, because in [1999](#) we find him rephrasing the above cited quotation accordingly: "The Hebrews used the word Aram for the present country of Syria, but the Greeks only used for that land the designation Syria, although, according to Strabo and other authors, they knew that Aramaeans, or people speaking Aramaic dialects, lived all over the 'Fertile Crescent' as well as in Cappadocia and elsewhere." The 'Hebrews', as is known, used 'Aram' and 'Aramean' as far as in Mesopotamia, and not merely for Syria.

So not all the classical writers were familiar with the Aramaeans, especially the early ones. That is why the Greeks, and later the Romans, often confused the Arameans, whom both of them called 'Syrians',<sup>17</sup> with the Assyrians. Surely, the Arameans were not the only people in antiquity that were lumped together as 'Assyrians' by careless Greek writers (cf. nn. 9-10).

Hence it is ironic, and self-contradictory, that Frye admitted that "The Greeks never use the term 'Aramaic' or 'Aramaean' but only 'Syrian'" (JNES, 1992:282; cf. his eighth footnote). How can Frye, in the light of my and his findings in 1992, still conclude that the Syrians, whether in ancient or modern times, in reality are 'Assyrians' if he himself explicitly stated that the Greeks knew the Arameans under the name Syrians?

#### *Self perception of the Syriacs through the ages*

Frye asked a good question, but he failed to answer it properly. "What," he inquired, "did the Neo-Syrian Aramaic-speaking [*sic*] Christians in the Near East call themselves in the Middle Ages?" (JNES, 1992:283). Before the ideology of nationalism was exported to the Middle East in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Western Christian missionaries, archeologists and colonial powers, the Aramaic-speaking Christians never really identified themselves with the descendants of the ancient Assyrians.<sup>18</sup> And if one reads the early stories of the travelers in Mesopotamia, or the writings of the early Christian missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier, it becomes clear that the (Eastern and Western) Syriacs simply designated themselves as 'Suryaye/Suryoye' (i.e. Syriacs) or 'Suraye' (East-Syriac tribes use this term as a self-reference; in Tur 'Abdin Aramaic, spoken by the Syriac-Orthodox, 'Suroye' really means little more than 'Christians').

For their self-perception, it suffices to provide one clear illustration. The Syriac-Orthodox church father Bar-Salibi (d. 1171), whom Mor Michael (d. 1199) admired very much, stated: "we are also called sometimes in the books by the name of Aramaeans [*Oromoye*]."<sup>19</sup>

#### *'Assyrians' only those from Iraq and Iran?*

The article reads as if *all* modern Syrians<sup>20</sup> are the children of the ancient Assyrians. Frye, however, shows some ambiguity: "Some of those speakers of Neo-Syriac who live or lived in present-day Iraq or Iran prefer to call themselves Assyrians to distinguish themselves from the inhabitants of present-day Syria. They are not wrong in this designation or in claiming descent from the ancient Assyrians." (JNES, 1992:284).

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<sup>17</sup> Why exactly the Greeks called the Arameans 'Syrians' (cf., however, n. 6) and why this term was in first place called into life, still remains obscure to me.

<sup>18</sup> As has been successfully pointed out by John Joseph, *op. cit.* (n. 11).

<sup>19</sup> A. Mingana, *The work of Dionysius Bar Salibi against the Armenians* (Woodbrooke Studies Vol. 4; Cambridge, 1931), 54.

<sup>20</sup> Except, of course, the Syrian Arabs, whom most 'Assyrian' nationalists do not recognize as 'Assyrians'.

It is known that ‘Assyrian’ nationalists consider nearly all the Aramaic-speaking Christians from the Middle East as ‘Assyrians’, irrespective of their church affiliation. Frye, however, only speaks of the ‘Assyrians’ of “present-day Iraq or Iran.” Does this imply that he did not regard those Aramaic-speaking Christians from Turkey or Syria, where most of the West-Syriac Christians come from, as ‘Assyrians’?

#### *Asori in Armenian*

We further read about the Armenians in whose language classical Syriac is known as “the Asori language.” This case, too, leads Frye to believe that “The general terms ‘Assyrian’ and ‘Syrian’ were regarded as synonyms not only in early times” (JNES, 1992:283).

*Asori*, as was long ago cogently argued by Joseph, does not mean ‘Assyrian’, but ‘Syrian’.<sup>21</sup> An Assyrian, however, is designated in Armenian literature as *Asorestants’i*. Last year, Prof. Joseph reiterated that the “Armenian name Asori referred to the people of geographical Syria, the Aramaeans; it was the name of Aramaeans wherever they were found.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, Arameans both in and outside the geographical boundaries of Syria were called *Asori*.

## 5. Final remarks

Prof. Frye began his article with an objection to a theory about the origins of the word Syria. Then, unexpectedly, he adduces arguments and historical information to prove an Assyrian descent for the Syriacs based on the hypothesis that the names ‘Syria’ and ‘Assyria’ were linguistically related to each other. This made me wonder what his real intention was. Was he interested in a linguistic or a historical subject? If the former, he did not succeed in adding substantially new facts or arguments to our understanding. In my view, he was more concerned with the ethnic origin of the “modern Assyrians” than with the linguistic derivation of the pre-Christian and Greek word ‘Syria(n)’. But in this respect he failed as well.

The reader should understand that I have only wished to tackle some arguments presented by Frye. Although I wanted to show how easily Frye ignores generally known facts, I have paid only little attention to this. All I did was concisely reinterpreting his own arguments and data. I could have added more, but I hope that I made my point sufficiently clear to the reader.

I have not shown any concern in this paper for the etymology of the word ‘Syria(n)’, because this is actually a different topic than the one under discussion here. But I would like to recall Frye’s opening remarks: “Confusion has existed between the two similar words ‘Syria’ and ‘Assyria’ throughout history almost down to our own day.” This confusion, whether in antiquity or in modern times, is mainly due to the similarity between the two names. I have tried to call attention for another aspect of this confusion in the present writing. Namely, the etymology of the word ‘Syria(n)’ which needs not to be mixed up with that of the historical identity of the people who happen to call themselves ‘Syrians’ only since the Christian epoch.

All in all, I believe that Joseph’s conclusion (JAAS, 1997:43) is worthy of repetition here: “There would have been no contradictions if Professor Frye had used *Aramean* and *Syrian* [italics Joseph] as synonyms, a usage that started over 2,000 years ago.”

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<sup>21</sup> J. Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbours* (Princeton 1961), 15; also consult the three Armenian dictionaries referred to by Joseph on p. 15 n. 53. Cf. Heinrichs, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 107.

<sup>22</sup> J. Joseph, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 20 n.69. See also Joseph (JAAS, 1997), 39f.