

The correct nomenclature of our language

By: David Dag

Dear reader, there is a disagreement different fraction amongst our people regarding the name of our mother-tongue in the western European languages:

- *Syriac?*
- *Aramaic?*
- *Chaldean?*
- *Assyrian?*

Which is the correct name?

If we are going to sort out which name is the correct one, then must look into history in different books and articles.

Syriac

The most common translation of "*leshono suryoyo*" is "Syriac language". This nomenclature is well known in the academia amongst scholars, in the fields of linguistics, among syrologists and Semitics.

In Sweden for example both the Syriac Federation and the Assyrian Federation have feared, that the term *Syriac* (in Swedish "*syriska*") for the language, could paradoxically be confused and mixed up with the official language of the so-called "Arab Republic of Syria" which of course is Arabic or Syrian Arabic (Arabic of Syria). The term Syrian or Syriac alone is never used to denote the language of Syria.

Orally in daily life amongst the civilians of our people who today identify themselves with the Aramean (Syriac) name in Swedish, call themselves "*Syrianer*" officially since 1980 instead of the "*Syrier*" and their language is mostly called "*syrianska*" instead of "*syriska*". This step was taken in Sweden because of the above mentioned reason. In order differentiate and distance oneself from the majority Muslim population of modern Syria. But in some articles, journals and books in Swedish, our language is called *syriska* and *Syriac* in English and is accepted and practiced as such in academic circles and amongst scholars. ‘

Before the 1980s in Sweden the Syriac Federation (*Syrianska Riksförbundet*) was known as "*Suryoyo Riksförbundet*", as well as some associations that were established in Södertälje in 1977 and in Trollhättan in 1979 were named "*Suryoyo Förening*". The one in Trollhättan is still known today under the old name and is the only one whose association-sign that still gives us a clue of the 1979 name-issue atmosphere.

Before some assyrianists - from *an elite of the Assyrian nationalist movement* - managed to impose the Assyrian (*assyrier*) name upon our entire people in Sweden since 1967 (that is when the first of our people immigrated to Sweden from Lebanon). Not all of them were “Assyrian minded” at all though. Most didn’t even know about the existence of the Assyrian movement.

Anyhow there were already existing books in Swedish that mentioned our people and language before 1967 (before even one of us even settled in Sweden). But the majority of the Swedes didn’t have deep knowledge about our people because there were no studies until much later about our people, when we were already an established minority. For example in 1920 a Swedish missionary L.E. Högberg mentioned our people in his book “*Bland Persians Mohammedaner*” (*Among the Mohammedans of Persia*). But we were not called *Syrianer* nor as *Assyrier* in it, but simply as *Syrier*. Other examples where one can find this term *Syrier* and *Syrer* is in theological studies in Sweden where “*St Ephrem the Syrian*” (306-373, also known as *Ephrem Syrus*) is still known in Swedish as *Efraim Syriern* and *Efraim Syrern*. And the 12th century Syriac Orthodox patriarch Mihael the Syrian (also known as Michael the Great, 1126-1199) is known as *Mikael Syriern*.

Another reason, as to why the terms *Syrianer* and *Syrianska*, were developed into the Swedish vocabulary was because; in the Middle East this difference was already practiced in Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish. These newly developed nomenclatures were introduced and fused into the Swedish language itself in order to fit a resembling model, that already existed in Turkish and Arabic.

The term *Syriac* (singular) and *Syriacs* (plural) were developed in English as well. But got first more or less an “official status” since the *American Census 2000*, and is still used since then in English.

Turkish

	<i>Syrian/Syrianer (folket)</i>
	<i>Syriac/Syriacs (people)</i>
<i>Süryani (singular) Süryaniler(plural)</i>	
	<i>Syrianska (språket)</i> <i>(korrekt: syriska)</i>
	<i>Syriac language</i>
<i>Süryanice</i>	
	<i>Syrisk/Syrier (folket)</i>
	<i>Syrian/Syrians (modern Syria)</i>
<i>Suri (singular) Suriyeler(plural)</i>	

Arabic

Syrian/syrianer (swedish, people)

*Suryan/Sirian,
suryaniye/Suryaniyun/Suryaniyin*

Syriac/Syriacs (people)

*Syrianska, syrianska språket
(korrekt: syriska)*

Syriac language

Suryani (al-lugha as-suryaniya)

Syrier, syrisk

Syrian, Syrians (modern Syria)

Suri (Suriyun/Suriyin)

Aramaic

Even if the correct nomenclature of the language's translation is **Syriac**, we also know that it's known as **Aramaic** as well. And that these two terms are synonymous and interchangeable from a linguistic and a traditional perspective. The difference between them is that **Syriac** is an *exonym* while **Aramaic** is the *endonym*, and the original name of the language itself. As an *exonym*, **Syriac** (but of course in the way the Greeks pronounced it), came indirectly and externally from the Greeks and later also entered the Edessan Aramaic (classical Syriac) literature, as late as between 390s and forward in the form *Suryoyo/Suryaya* (singular, for a person as well as the language) and *Suryoye/Suryaye* (plural) and is used synonymously with *Leshono Oromoyo/Lishana Aramaya (Aramaic language)* as well as *Oromoyo/Aramaya* (singular, Aramean) and *Oromoye/Aramaye* (plural, Arameans)

It's sometimes believed and claimed that it's only the Aramaic idiom of Urhoy (Edessa) i.e Edessan Aramaic that has a "patent" on the term Syriac. But this is not true, even if it's the best known Aramaic dialect or form of Aramaic – *amongst the many different varieties or plethora of the Aramaic dialects/forms* – to go under the name Syriac, especially if one is limited to look at languages trees only. This is also confirmed by the Harvard University scholar John Joseph, who mentioned the German Semitic language scholar Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930), and what he wrote about nomenclature of the language itself. John Joseph wrote:

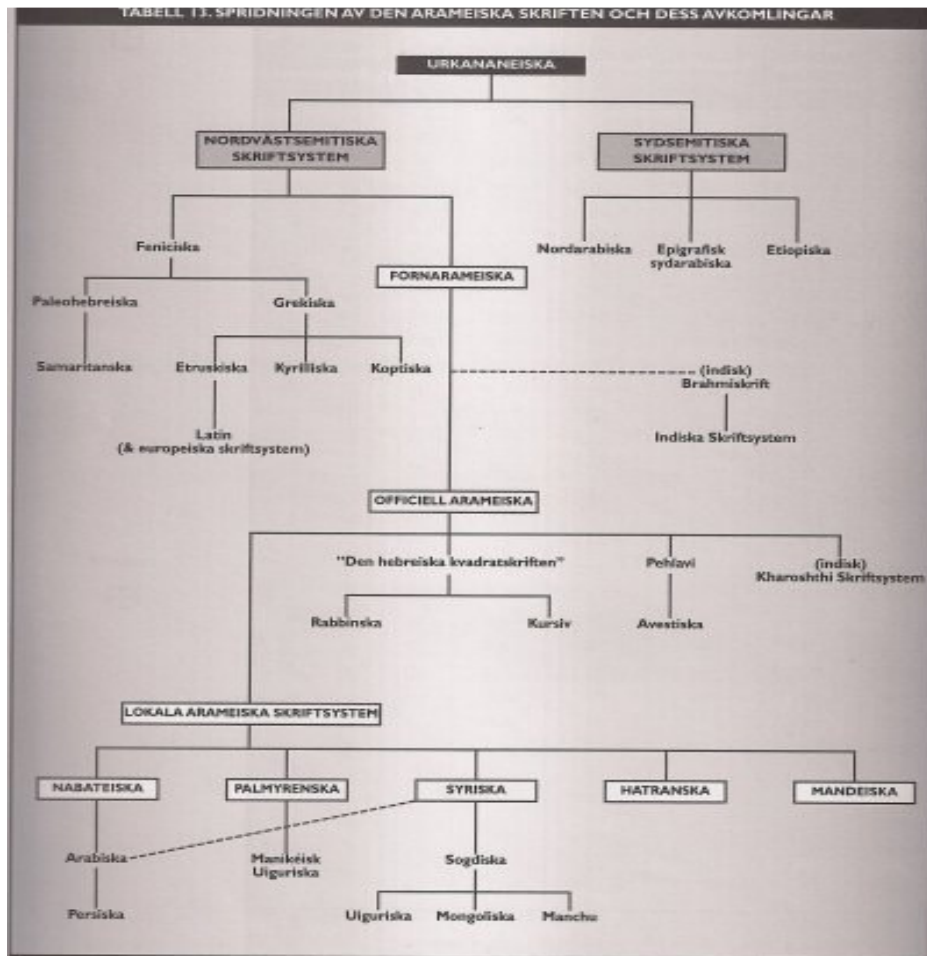
"In [Roman] Palestine itself, the Jews and later the Christians there, referred to their dialect of Aramaic as Syriac; in Babylon, both Greeks and Persians called Arameans Syrians[38]"

¹⁰ See T. Nöldeke, "Semitic Languages," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., p. 625; Nöldeke also notes that it is, "properly speaking, incorrect to employ the word 'Syriac' as meaning the language of Edessa alone" even though Edessan Aramaic has the best claim to it.

Is it just the forms of Aramaic east of the Euphrates River that are known as Syriac?

Otherwise other Aramaic dialects are also known as Syriac indirectly because the "Central Neo-Aramaic" of Tur Abdin is known as *Surayt Turoyo (Turabdinoyo)* as well as *Suryoyo Turoyo (Turabdinoyo)*, The above mentioned "Edessan Aramaic" is also known as *Suryoyo Urhoyo (Suryaya Urhaya)*, "(North)eastern neo-Aramaic" is known as *Sureth* but also as *Suryaya (the Iraq constitution calls it Suryani in Arabic and not ashuri nor kaldani)*.

The so-called [Maaloula dialect](#) is known as *Suryon* as well as *Aromai* (sometimes called *Arami* and sometimes *Suryani* in Arabic) and is classified as Western Neo-Aramaic. It's spoken both by Christians as well as Muslims of Maaloula as well as in its neighboring villages of Jubb'Addin and Bakha (Sarkha) outside Damascus in Syria far west from Mesopotamia. Even what scholars labeled as "Jewish Palestinian" was known as Sursi. "Christian Palestinian Aramaic" (CPA) that is outdead like the former one. CPA is sometimes called "*Mekite Syriac*" and "*Jerusalem Syriac*" as well and was used the Chalcedonian orthodox Melkites (Rum Orthodox, Antiochian Orthodox Church) in the areas of the Sinai peninsula, Jerusalem area, Damscus while the ones in Antioch used Edessan Aramaiuc instead. Gnostic Mandeans of Iran and Iraq - whose liturgical Aramaic is known as *Mandaic Aramaic*- is known in Arabic as *Arami* as well as *suryani*.

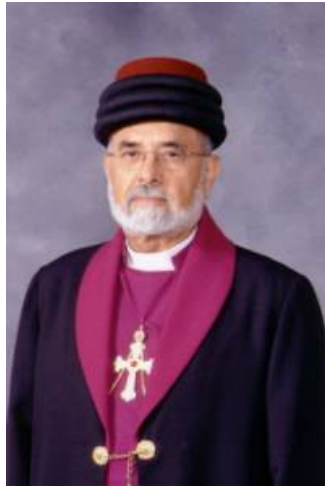


(Source: *The Hidden Pearl Vol I: The Ancient Aramaic Heritage* – by Sebastian Brock and David Taylor, the picture is from the Swedish translation of the book)

Chaldean

The Arameans (Syriacs) who are members of the Chaldean Catholic Church, are today mainly divided into two political ethno-nationalistic ideologies, namely between *Chaldeanism* (Chaldean nationalism) and *Assyrianism* (Assyrian nationalism). The majority are adherents of Chaldeanism, while a minority is adherents of *Assyrianism*. And very few of them just regard themselves as “*Christian Iraqis*”, “*Christian Arabs*” but also “*Christian Kurds*”. All these last mentioned, based on ignorance and Iraqi and Kurdish assimilative media propaganda..

The Chaldean Catholic Church is an offshoot from *The Church of the East* (also known as *East Syrian Church*, *Persian Church*, and polemically as *Nestorian Church*), since 1550s (between 1551-1553). The *Church of the East*, was later in modern times divided into two patriarchal lines since a schism in broke out between 1963-1968. Once is calling itself *Assyrian Church of the East* and the other *Ancient Church of the East*. Their respective patriarchs are Mar Khananya IV Dinkha, who resides in Chicago in America. and the other Mar Addai II, in Baghdad in Iraq.



Mar Khananya IV Dinka



Mar Addai II

Anyhow most Chaldeans from their Chaldean identity aspect, call their Northeastern or Eastern Neo-Aramaic spoken vernacular, *Sureth*, by the name Chaldean (*Lishana Kaldaya*, *Kaldanaya* and *Kaldani* in Arabic) as well as their liturgical language (*lishana Kaldaya atiq*a and *Kaldaya sepraya*). Their liturgical language is Edessan Aramaic (classical Syriac) just like the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Syriac Maronite. The only difference between them would be Edessan Aramaic dialectal. Where the first ones with the Syriac name to their title use West-Syriac dialect on Edessan Aramaic while the Chaldean Catholic, the *Ancient Church of the East* and the *Assyrian Church of the East* use East-Syriac dialect on the Edessan Aramaic.

One example where Edessan Aramaic is called Chaldean is the dictionary of the Chaldean Catholic metropolitan archbishop of Basra in southern Iraq, Yaqub Augin Manna. It's an Aramaic to Arabic dictionary that had the title "*Aramaic Arabic dictionary*" but was later renamed "*Chaldean-Arabic dictionary*"

According to another Chaldean 19th metropolitan archbishop, Mar Touma Odu (Audo), who also composed an Edessan Aramaic dictionary, that was first published in 1897 in the Dominican printing press in Mosul in northern Iraq (and later republished many times, two times by assyrianists with a misleading revised pro-Assyrian title "*Dictionary in the Assyrian Language*" 1978 Chicago, and 1979, Assyrian Federation of Sweden). But this dictionary in contrast to the other one by Manna is known as "*Treasure of the Syriac language*" (*Simta d-lishana Suryaya*).

language is used in Daniel and Ezra, but the use of the name "Chaldee" to describe it, first introduced by Jerome, is incorrect and a misnomer."



Even John Joseph mentioned this in his book "[The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East – encounters with western christians missions archeologists & colonial powers](#)" (see "Chaldeans" p. 3-9).

John Joseph mentioned the Chaldean catholic colleague of the British archeologist Austen Henry Layard, namely Hormuzd Rassam, and what he erroneously claimed:

Rassam wrote that "the present Chaldeans [members of both the Nestorian Church and its Catholic offshoot], with few exceptions, speak the same dialect that is used in the Targums, and in some parts of Ezra and Daniel, which are called Chaldee."³²

As I've mentioned before, the Chaldean Catholics don't use this form of "Chaldee or Chaldean"

But rather use Edessan Aramaic

According to Eusebius the bishop of Ceaserea in (Byzantine Palestine) mentions the ancient Chaldean Berossus (*Bēl-rē'ušu*) pagan priest of the Marduk (Eusebius Chronicle in its Armenian version. p. 43) who lived in 3rd centuryBC, Eusebius wrote that Berossus called the Babylonian form of Akkadian cuneiform, "*Chaldaika Grammata*" ,(Chaldean letters) in Greek. And so did a certain Amyntas (Athenus 529). Does this mean that the ancient Chaldeans of Babylon called their Babylonian Akkadian language and cuneiform script, Chaldean as well? Even though Berossus was a native in Babylon during the time of Alexander the great (or the during Seleucid period) , a question comes up to as whether or not the Berossus himself used this term in Greek or if Eusebius called the script of Berrosus by that name indirectly even though Berossus

himself didn't. Even if Berossus might have used it, it was because the book was intended for a Greek speaking audience.

Be that as it may, all historians and linguists agree that the ancient Chaldeans spoke Babylonian-Akkadian and Aramaic and that they never named one of these Chaldean in their own usage back then.

Assyrian

Those Arameans (Syriacs) who identify themselves as Assyrians – though not all pro-Assyrianists – erroneously call their language Assyrian (they have for example coined different “exotic” combinations of, all by themselves such as, “*West-Assyrian*” (Turoyo), “*East-Assyrian*” (Sureth), “*Assyrian neo-Aramaic*”, “*neo-Assyrian*”, “*modern Assyrian*”, and the European Iranologist Richard Nelson Frye, is the only one who called Syriac by the name “*Assyriac*” in his “*Assyria and Syria: synonyms*”, all these exotic Assyrian combinations, are simply based on their wishful thinking)

The term Assyrian is *de facto*, from an academic perspective, reserved for a variant of the Akkadian (cuneiform) called “*ashuritu*” or “*ashuritu akkadatu*”. Have in mind that this *ashuritu* (Assyrian) had between 600-700 cuneiform symbols. *Ashuritu*/Assyrian died out ca 2500 years ago, and can only be read and “written” (chissled etc) by Assyriologists only (who study the science of Assyriology at universities). So nobody speaks Assyrian today, not even the East-Syriac Nestorians of Iraq, Iran etc. In contrast to Assyrian (*ashuritu*) the Babylonian form of Akkadian even outlived it until the 3rd century AD.

Whereas the language Assyriologists call “*Assyrian*” consists 22 consonant letters (*Alap/Olaf* to *Taw*) and is known as Edessan Aramaic or Syriac. The spoken Aramaic vernacular known as *Sureth Swadaya* (erroneously known as *ashuri* and *kaldani* in Arabic, is in fact known in the Iraqi constitution since the 1970s officially as *suryani*). This form/dialect is classified by the objective mainstream majority of scholars as “*Northeastern Neo-Aramaic*”, “*Eastern Neo-Aramaic*” and also as “*Eastern Neo-Syriac*” (the Slovakian scholar Rudolph Macuch used this last terminology but he left out the “*Western Neo-Aramaic*” of Maaloula and its neighboring Muslim villages Jubb ‘Addin and Bakh’a/Sarkha in the Qalamun Mountain area, outside Damascus in Syria. He limited himself to the forms of Aramaic east of the Euphrates, such as *Turoyo* of Tur Abdin which labeled Western Neo-Syriac and *Sureth* Eastern Neo-Syriac.

The only linguist I know of, that uses the name “*modern Assyrian*” for the neo-Aramaic vernacular *Sureth*, is the Cambridge University scholar Geoffrey Khan in his “[Remarks on the historical background of the Modern Assyrian Language](#)”. One interesting thing in it is the fact that he mentions “*an Arabic materia medica work that was composed in Spain in the early eleventh century, al-Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī by Ibn Baklarish. In this work the Arabic names of medicinal elements are listed together with the corresponding terms in a variety of other languages in Arabic transcription, including what the author designates as al-suryāniyya, which one would assume would be [classical] Syriac. What is fascinating, however, is that many of these words in al-suryāniyya are not at all classical Syriac*” and he adds that it refers to *Sureth* instead and quotes a place from it

Ibn Baklarish, *al-Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī* (MS Arcadia library 11th century):

لبن النسا : ... يعرف النسا ... بالسريانية بختة

'The milk of women: 'Women' in *suryāniyya is baxta*'

(See Geoffrey. Khan, *Remarks on the transcriptions of Syriac Words in Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī of Ibn Baklarish (According to the Arcadian Library MS)* in C. Burnett (ed.), *Proceedings of the Ibn Baklarish Symposium, London, 2007*)

This "category" of scholars call it "modern Assyrian" simply because they want to "respect" and "not anger" those who have chosen an Assyrian self-identification and also partly because they have indirectly fallen victim to the Assyrian nationalistic propaganda, when they identify it as such..

Different arguments that assyrianists use in order to "justify" calling the language Assyrian.

- *The identity aspect – "since we call ourselves Assyrians, one can automatically therefore call the language Assyrian as well" (even though the name Assyrian is linguistically reserved for an outdead language)."*
- *"The language's name is Syriac, and since the etymology of Syrian is derived from Assyrian."*
- *"The ancient Greeks called Aramaic "Assyria Grammata" and later "Syria Grammata" "*
- *"Ancient Assyrians learned Aramaic in the last decade or so of their empire which they later renamed Assyrian"*
- *"The modern Aramaic dialects that we speak contains Assyrian/Akkadian words"*
- *"The root of the nomenclature of our language is Sur – Surayt, Sureth, Suryoyo/Suryaya – and is derived etymologically from the name of Ashur in cuneiform. That later evolved to Shur and later Sur."*
- *It's only the Aramaic forms/dialects spoken east of the Euphrates that has the root Sur.*

These are subjective arguments they use today. I have already refuted and debunked some of these claims in my other articles. Let's take a closer look at the remaining ones.

"The Aramaization of Assyria"

Some believe that the "Aramaization" of the Neo-Assyrian Empire was only a linguistic process, in fact it wasn't. And assyrianists also claim the reason for it was:

- Aramaic was easier to learn and write and read in contrast the Assyrian/Akkadian cuneiform
- Aramaic has 22 alphabetic letters Vs. the 600- 700 cuneiform signs of Assyrian/Akkadian
- Aramaic could be written on more practical materials – animalskin and papyrus – while Assyrian Akkadian cuneiform was written on claytablet, waxboards (niyaru), and chisled in stone. (notice that It was only the ancient Assyrians aristocracy that could read and write cuneiform)
- Aramaic was used by all classes in society (both in writing and in speech)

These arguments are correct, but one has left out another important reason for the Aramaization process, namely the increase of Arameans in the heartland of Assyria itself (in north Iraq). If one studies what other Assyriologists have written about it, one gets an entirely different picture on this topic. These are Albert Kirk Grayson, Allan R. Millard, Ran Zadok and Hayim Tadmor.

“Since the linguistic capture of Assyria by the Aramaic language can only be understood in the light of the ‘Aramaization of Assyria,’ as this process is generally called, I will quote three more Assyriologists on this topic. According to Prof. Albert Kirk Grayson, ‘there were Arameans within Assyria itself, and their numbers gradually increased as time went by. This in turn had a major cultural impact upon Assyrian civilization. ... The reason for this major Aramaic presence [sc. that Aramaic was widespread in Assyria] was the increasing number of Arameans living in Assyria from the 9th century on.’[22] ‘It was surely through the penetration of Arameans into Assyrian society at all levels,’ noted another scholar, ‘that the greatest impact was made.’[23] Still another specialist confirmed this, saying that the Assyrians ‘were capable of constant Assyrianization of foreigners only in their core country, namely Assyria proper and certain adjacent regions...whereas in the periphery...the West-Semitic (practically Aramean) majority prevailed and even increased in the last generation of the Assyrian empire...There is no doubt that after the fall of the Assyrian empire Assyria proper has been completely Aramaicized within a few decades.’[24]

[22].(Albert Kirk Grayson, “Mesopotamia (History and Culture of Assyria),” in D. N. Freedman (ed.),Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 740 and 741.)

[23].(Allan.R. Millard, “Assyrians and Arameans,” in Iraq 45 (1983), p. 107.)

[24] (Ran Zadok, “The Ethno-Linguistic Character of the Jezireh and Adjacent Regions in the 9th-7th centuries (Assyria Proper vs. Periphery),” in Mario Liverani (ed.), Neo-Assyrian Geography (University of Rome, 1995), p. 281.)

(Johny Messos artikel mot Gabriel Afram [“Gabriel Afram’s logical fallacies: The Jews remembered their adopted Aramaic script as ‘Assyrian’. Ergo, we can call our original Aramaic script and language accordingly.”](#) Published 2006

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was so Aramaicized that archeologists have unearthed a few clay tablets with Assyrian-Akkadian cuneiform, that although written in cuneiform, the language itself that they are written in, is Aramaic rather than Assyrian-Akkadian. (just like in the case of *Garshuni*, where Arabic is written in Aramaic-Syriac characters)

The Assyriologist Hayim Tadmor wrote the following about the Aramaization:

“An attempt has been made in this paper to outline the evidence for the impact of the West on the Assyrian Empire, predominantly that of the Arameans and the Aramaic language, initiated by annexing the lands west of the Khabur and the Euphrates and by mass deportations. In time the Arameans gradually transformed the cultural face of the Empire and were to outlive Assyria by serving as the link with the succeeding Chaldean and Achaemenid [Persian] Empires.

The Assyrians, vastly outnumbered by their captives, forced them to participate in the building and maintaining of their state and inevitably, if therefore, absorbed much linguistically and culturally from the West. That this was not a one-way process, but rather a highly complex symbiotic relationship between the Assyrians and the Arameans, can no longer be doubted”

(Hayim Tadmor “[The Aramaization of Assyria: aspects of Western Impact](#)”)

“Prof. Simo Parpola’s http://www.auf.nu/cafe/pdf/parpola_eng.pdf, p. 3: “many of its [the Assyrian empire] ethnic minorities seem to have retained their identities (at least to some extent) till the very end of the Empire.” His examples are “Egyptians, Israelites, Arabs, Anatolians and Iranians” who can be identified “on the basis of their names or the ethnic labels attached to them.” It is telling that the Aramean people, who are otherwise always mentioned in scholarly works dealing with ethnic minorities within Assyria, and concerning whom there is plenty of evidence, are disregarded here. Note, too, that the article mentions them only four times and, moreover, reduces them to a linguistic group. Hence, “The Aramaization of Assyria” (p. 4) is treated as if it were just a linguistic process. Frankly, Prof. Parpola is biased to the extreme in favor of an Assyrian identity for our people”

(This quotation is from a footnote of Johny Messos article against Gabriel Afram “[Gabriel Afram’s logical fallacies: The Jews remembered their adopted Aramaic script as ‘Assyrian’](#). Ergo, we can call our original Aramaic script and language accordingly”

Did the ancient Assyrians ever call Aramaic by the name Assyrian during the neo-assyrian emperial period?

No, they differentiated between their own mothertounge – which they called “*ashuritu*” (Assyrian) – and Aramaic. Aramaic with its 22 letter alphabet was called “*Armitu*” and “*Armaya*” in the Assyrian-Akkadian cuneiform (*Ashuritu Akkadatu*).

- “*Egirtu Armitu*” (Aramaic letter)
- “*Nibzu Armaya*” (Aramaic document)
- “*Tupsharru Aramaya*” in contrast to “*Tupsharru Ashuraya*” (Aramean respective Assyrian royal scribe)

(Hayim Tadmor – “[The Aramaization of Assyria: aspects of Western impact](#)” see also his “*The Role of Aramaic in the Assyrian Empire*”)

Which writing systems and languages have been called Assyrian by the ancient Greeks?

- Aramaic ("Assyria Grammata" ,"Syria Grammata" (for script) and *Suristi* (language))
- Old Persian cuneiform

Did the ancient Greeks ever call the Aramaic script Assyrian?

Yes, unfortunately they have and I will explain why.

Oxford University scholars Sebastian Brock and David Taylor wrote the following about it in

"*The Hidden Pearl Vol. I: The Ancient Aramaic Heritage*" on page 122:

"Under the Achaemenid [*Persian*] Empire Aramaic was probably the language used in diplomatic relations between the Achaemenid [*Persian*] kings and the Greek cities of western Asia Minor. The Greek historian Herodotus recounts how Darius I (BC 522-486), on reaching the Bosphorus, set up two stelaes listing the names of all the nations who were serving in his army: one of these, he tells us (*Histories*. IV.87), was in Greek writing, while the other was in "Assyrian letters [*Assyria grammata*]". Since no one in that region would have been capable of reading a cuneiform inscription (in either Akkadian or Old Persian), it is very likely that Herodotus meant Aramaic, the international language of diplomacy. The same term "Assyrian letters" certainly means Aramaic in another Greek historian, Thucydides (*History*, IV.50) who records that in BC 425/4 the Athenian general Aristeides arrested a Persian messenger named Artaphernes who was carrying a letter from the Persian king Artaxerxes destined for the Spartans (who were enemies of the Athenians): He was taken to Athens where the letter was translated from "Assyrian letters" [*Assyria Grammata*] into Greek. Since the letter will have been written on leather, the language must have been Aramaic, and cannot possibly have been Akkadian. The slightly later Greek historians, Xenophon and Diodorus, both speak of "Syrian letters [*Syria grammata*]" when they refer to the use of Aramaic in the Achaemenid Empire. The source of this confusing usage, where the terms "Assyrian letters" and "Syrian letters" both mean Aramaic, lies in the fact, noted earlier (in Chapter 2), that the Greeks, like the Egyptians, named all the territory of the former Assyrian Empire as "Assyria", even when they were just referring to the western Provinces (that is, Palestine and Syria).

A passage which sheds some interesting sidelight on the ambiguity of the term "Assyrian letters" is to be found in the last Epistle (no. 21) of a Greek collection of correspondence attributed to the famous Athenian politician Themistokles (c.524 -459 BC), in which he asks someone to send him "some gold and silver vessels inscribed with the old Assyrian letters, not those which Darius, the father of Xerxes, recently prescribed to the Persians".

What are these two different kinds of "Assyrian letters"?

The more recent ones clearly refer to Old Persian cuneiform, introduced c.520 for royal inscriptions. Since a Greek would not be able to distinguish between Old Persian cuneiform and Akkadian cuneiform script, it is clear that the "old Assyrian letters" will refer, not to Akkadian cuneiform, but to Aramaic script. By good fortune, archaeological finds confirm this conclusion (by C. Nylander) very nicely, for several inscribed gold and silver cups and bowls from western Iran, dating from the late eighth to the fifth century, are known, and these bear their owners name either in Aramaic script or in Old Persian cuneiform. Gold and silver ware of this kind was much sought after. And the plunder taken by the Greeks after their victory over the Persians at the Battle of Plataea in BC 479 might well have been the source for the vessels that Themistokles was asking for. Essentially, then, for the ancient Greeks the phrase "Assyrian letters" [*Assyria Grammata*] simply meant an "oriental script" –whose identity can only be deduced today from the context in which the term is found. Probably this is why later Greek writers preferred the term "Syrian letters" [*Syria Grammata*], in order to avoid the ambiguity of the earlier phrase."

One can also add that Xenophon called not only the Aramaic script “*Suriya Grammata*” (*Syria Grammata*) but also the Aramaic language itself by the Greek name *Suristi* “*tous suristi epistamenous*” (*those who understood Syriac*). This was used in the context that he knew that Aramaic was spoken in Babylon during the time of king Cyrus the Great of Persia. This same *Suristi* is also found in the Septuagint where the Hebrew *Aramit* (Aramaic) was translated as *Suristi* (Syrian tongue, Syriac).

(Theodor Nöldeke “*Assurios, Surios, Suros*”, *Hermes* no. 5 1871)

Herodotos	<i>Assyria Grammata</i>	Aramaic script
Thykidides	<i>Assyria Grammata</i>	Aramaic script
Xenophon	<i>Syria Grammata, Suristi</i>	Aramaic script, Aramaic language
Diodoros	<i>Syria Grammata</i>	Aramaic script
Themistokles	<i>Assyria Grammata</i>	Old Persian cuneiform
*Septuagint	<i>Suristi</i>	Aramaic (language)

(The Hidden Pearl Vol. I The Ancient Aramaic Heritage, chapter 2, page. 8 and 9 – Sebastian Brock and David Taylor. See also [chapter 6, page. 122](#) – Sebastian Brock and David Taylor.

See also Richard C Steiner – “[Why The Aramaic Script was called Assyrian in Hebrew Greek & Demotic](#)” where he wrote about the reason “*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.*”

Johny Messo comments this topic as well against Richard Nelson Frye:

“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 “ (Johny Messo Vs. Richard N. Frye - [Assyria and Syria: synonyms?](#))

(Johny Messo’s “[Gabriel Afram’s logical fallacies: The Jews remembered their adopted Aramaic script as ‘Assyrian’](#). Ergo, we can call our original Aramaic script and language accordingly”)

This confusion is also evident in the New Testament Gosepl translations regarding Aramaic.

I showed how confused the Greeks were regarding the Aramaic script and Old Persian cuneiform, which they called “Assyrian letters” (Assyria Grammata). They same happened for example in the Gospel of John in *koine* Greek, where number of places as well as a language that is placed over the cross of Jesus Christ, that is said to have been in “*hebraisti*”, which often is translated as “in Hebrew”, but because the name of the places are written in their Aramaic form instead of their Hebrew form, it’s believed that it rather means “in (the Semitic language) spoken by the Jews”; without making any distinction between Aramaic and Hebrew. This is also evident in three episodes in the “Book of the Acts” (Acts of the Apostles), with a reference to the language that was heard during the conversations of Paul the Apostle (Book of Acts 26:14”), and the language he used when he spoke to the crowd in Jerusalem (Book of Acts 21:40, 22:2).

Have the Romans called the Aramaic language Assyrian?

Yes they have, but there are also sources in Latin that calls it “Syrian” as well.

The Roman Ammianus Marcellinus who lived in Antioch during the 4th century AD wrote the following about Seleucus I Nicator (the founder of the Seleucid dynasty after Alexander the Great and after the *Diodochi* wars):

For by taking advantage of the great number of men whom he ruled for a long time in peace, in place of their rustic dwellings he built cities of great strength and abundant wealth; and many of these, although they are now called by the Greek names which were imposed upon them by the will of their founder, nevertheless have not lost the old appellations in the Assyrian tongue which the original settlers gave them.⁵

Ammianus Marcellinus refers to Aramaic and not the outdead “*ashuritu*” (assyrian-akkadian) cuneiform.

(Ammianus Marcellinus 14.6 page. 69; see also Amir Harrak - [The Ancient name of Edessa](#) p. 210)

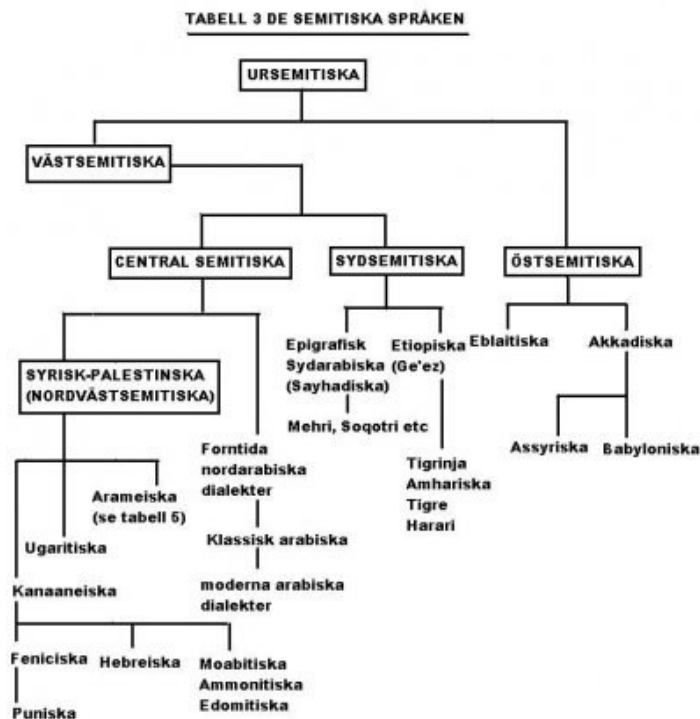
John Joseph wrote in his article against Richard Nelson Frye "[Assyria & Syria: synonyms?](#)" on page 39. Where it says the following: "Aramaic: "called Syrian by the Romans""

Josephs source was the Oxford scholar Fergus Millars' book "[The Roman Near East 31 BC – AD 337](#)" (Cambridge, 1993), pages.227, 454-455, 460

What language and/or script has the right to be called Assyrian today?

- A):The Akkadian form *ashuritu*?
- B): Aramaic script (because it was called "Assyrian" in Greek [*Assyria Grammata*], hebrew [*Ktav Ashuri*], and in the ancient Egyptian language known as Demotic)?
- C): Old Persian cuneiform?
- D) The present day Hebrew script known as *ktav Ashuri* in the Jewish Babylonian Talmud ?

The answer is without any doubt the outdead "*ashuritu*", partly because it's the first language in history that chronologically is called Assyrian and also because they ancient Assyrians are the only ones who has the legitimate right to this linguistic nomenclature for their own out dead mother-tongue



Notice that the Assyrian name is under Akkadian

Conclusion

- **Assyrian** = outdead language, the term is already reserved for another language.
- **Chaldean (Chaldee)** = St Jerome erroneously called “Standard Bible Aramaic” Chaldee, only as a misnomer. The Sureth spoken by Chaldean Catholics can hence not be called Chaldean
The Ancient Chaldeans never called their Babylonian Akkadian mother tongue nor Aramaic by the Chaldean name.
- **Aramaic** = still a living language in different forms or dialects.
Syriac = still living and synonymous with Aramaic.
The correct nomenclature is Aramaic but can be called Syriac as well.

In other words one cannot use the politicized compromise nomenclature “*Assyrian/Syriac*” (used from time to time in many Assyrian ideology websites. They are even trying to promote the Assyrian name like they doing “commercials for a business”).