The city of Edessa (modern Urfa in south-east Turkey) has yielded a number of ancient Syriac inscriptions through which one may form a picture of some aspects of its history, a glimpse of the course of the history of the “Blessed city” that was Edessa. The inscriptions provide us also with valuable information relating to the names of certain kings which can help to establish parts of the genealogy of the ruling dynasty: “The importance of these inscriptions is almost inversely proportional to their number and extent.”

The early dated Syriac inscriptions use three different numeral systems in dating the texts: numeral symbols (ciphers), written-out numbers and an alphabet-based system.

NUMERAL SYMBOLS

Writing is perhaps the greatest invention, since it made the documentation of human history possible. The origin of writing was connected with the practical need for keeping records of palace and temple property and produce in the early Near East. The necessity emerged to use number symbols from the beginning of writing to assist in economic and administrative operations. The peoples of the ancient Near East had methods of employing different signs to denote numerals without having to write the words out in full.

The Sumerians had already devised symbols for numerals and two systems of counting: one was decimal, based on ten as the unit (1-10-100-1000), and the other, sexagesimal, based on the powers of 60 (1-60-3600). In the earliest stage, at about 3000 B.C., numbers were represented by strokes indicating units and circular impressions indicating tens. A combination of both could produce a large numeral. As the pictograms of the earliest writing developed gradually into abstract cuneiform (wedge-shaped) signs, the numeral signs were correspondingly changed. The symbol for 1 was indicated by a single wedge (тир) and for 10 a broad oblique wedge (кр) as a unit in the sexagesimal system, 60 could be expressed by a vertical wedge, originally recognized by its larger size than the wedge denoting 1, though the distinction in size later disappeared. The sign for 100 could be written either (in the early period) by a big circle (O) or by a special sign (ت٥), pronounced "ME."
As for West Semitic, the numerals used in dating inscriptions were mainly written with particular signs corresponding to our figures. These signs are represented in ways that remained the same for many centuries. Obviously every script developed considerably over the course of time and in agreement with this fact the numerals also presented development in forms.

In the West Semitic Aramaic tradition (early Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Syriac and Hatran) the numerical notations were initially very simple, using a single vertical stroke to represent the units and adding other strokes up to 9 (except for 5, which appears sometimes in a different form). A special sign was used for 10 and similarly 20 has a sign of its own, whereas all the other numbers from 1 to 99 are formed by placing the basic signs side by side. The signs for units ten, twenty and hundred in Old Syriac are shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Symbols</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>/=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>a/ or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>b/ or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tens</td>
<td>c/ d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty</td>
<td>e/ f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hundred</td>
<td>g/ h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Old Syriac Numeral Symbols

The numeral signs found in the Old Syriac inscriptions are represented in the following examples:

“In the month of Adar of the year (3x100) +10+1+1+1+1+1+1+1 (=Seleucid 317, A.D. 6)”

“In the month of Former Tešri of the year (3x100) +20+20+20+20+1+1+1+1+1 (=Seleucid 385, A.D. 73)”

“On the 10+1+1+1 day of Adar of the year (4x100)+20+20+20+10+5+1 (=Seleucid 476, A.D. 165.”

“In the month of Šebat of the year (4x100) +20+20+20+10+1+1+1+1+1+1 (=Seleucid 476, A.D. 165.)”

“In Šebat of the year (4x100) +20+20+20+10+1+2+1+2 (=Seleucid 476, A.D. 165.)”

The numeral signs, which are used in the dated Syriac inscriptions of the first century A.D. are as follows: a simple stroke for the numeral 1; five simple vertical strokes for 5; 10 is represented by a horizontal line with a small tail downward; 20 has the form $\land$; and 100 has almost the same sign as 10, but with a small extra stroke in the tail: $\land$. 

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LXXI; g- Drijvers and Healey 1999, Pl.58 (Bs2); h- Drijvers and Healey 1999, Pl. 25 (As36); i- Welles 1959, Pls. LXIX-LXXI.
Some differences in certain inscriptions of the second century A.D. from Sumatar\textsuperscript{17} appear in the case of the numerals 2, 5 and 6. The numeral 2 is given the sign \(\text{\textsuperscript{w}}\) in one of these inscriptions.\textsuperscript{18} The latter is quite similar to the “Arabic” numeral 2 in current use in the Arab world. The numeral 5, as in later Syriac, has the form of the letter \(\text{\textsuperscript{w}}\).\textsuperscript{19} Finally, the sign for 6 is drawn in different forms: as six simple vertical strokes \(\text{\textsuperscript{w}}\); as the sign for numeral 5 with a simple vertical stroke at the left-hand side of it \(\text{\textsuperscript{w}}\);\textsuperscript{20} and by the form \(\text{\textsuperscript{w}}\).\textsuperscript{21} The same early forms for 1, 10, 20 and 100 are also found in the Syriac Deed of Sale from Dura Europos, dated to A.D. 243.\textsuperscript{22}

The numerical notations used in Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Syriac, and Hatran are very similar, evidently developing from a common source.\textsuperscript{23}

**WRITTEN-OUT NUMBERS**

While the above ciphers were used in writing, it is obvious that in reading the inscriptions the numbers would be given their full grammatical form. In the Old Syriac inscriptions as in Classical Syriac and other Semitic languages, the numbers 1-19 have masculine and feminine forms, according to the grammatical gender of the noun to which they are attached. The numerals from 3-10 use the masculine formation with feminine nouns, and vice versa. The numerals 1 and 2 show the same gender as that of the noun to which they refer.

The occurrences of the numbers written out in the dates of the Old Syriac texts (including the dated legal documents from the 240s A.D.) are as follows:

1- d\(\text{\textsuperscript{s}}\)nt ‘rb’ m’ “of the year four hundred.”\textsuperscript{25} This could be the earliest Syriac inscription found so far with the numbers written out in full. It shows only the number 400 and the other following numbers which should be expected are missing. Therefore the Seleucid date is evidently between 400 and 499. At the latest, the text was written in A.D. 187-88.\textsuperscript{26}

2- b\(\text{\textsuperscript{hm}}\)šm” w\(\text{\textsuperscript{lt}}\)šr’ “in [the year] five hundred and thirteen.”\textsuperscript{27} In the dating formula the word (\(\text{\textsuperscript{s}}\)nt) “year” is not mentioned in this inscription but it is understood from the fact that the numeral agrees with a feminine noun. The Seleucid year 513 corresponds to A.D. 201-02.\textsuperscript{28}

3- by\(\text{\textsuperscript{r}}\)h ‘dr şnt ‘šryn “In the month of Adar of the year twenty.”\textsuperscript{29} The dating formula is expressed with the name of month Adar, which is equivalent to March, and the year number 20 with the omission of the five hundred on account of its redundancy.\textsuperscript{30}

4- by\(\text{\textsuperscript{r}}\)h ‘b şnt [...]m’ [...]wtš’ “In the month of Ab of the year [...] hundred [...] and nine.”\textsuperscript{31} This date follows a standard formula, which is also shown in the previous example. The month name Ab corresponds to August. The first number of the year is missing. Therefore one may assume the number 500, in which case the Seleucid date would be between 529 and 599. But on art-historical grounds it could be suggested that the year is 529/539/549 (A.D. 218, 288, 238).\textsuperscript{32}

5- by\(\text{\textsuperscript{r}}\)h nysn šnt h\(\text{\textsuperscript{hm}}\)šn’ w\(\text{\textsuperscript{lt}}\)šn w\(\text{\textsuperscript{hm}}\)š “in the month of Nisan of the year five hundred and thirty-five.”\textsuperscript{33} The year 535 in the Seleucid era corresponds to A.D. 223/24 but the month of Nisan (April) of 535 fell in A.D. 224.\textsuperscript{34}

6- by\(\text{\textsuperscript{r}}\)h t\(\text{\textsuperscript{m}}\)wz šnt t\(\text{\textsuperscript{lt}}\)šn w\(\text{\textsuperscript{t}}\)š “in the month of Tammuz of the year thirty-nine.”\textsuperscript{35} The dating is similar to what has been mentioned earlier, with the 500 to be added to the year number. In this case, the year is 539 in the Seleucid era, which corresponds to A.D. 227/28. With
the month of *Tammuž* (July), it fell in A.D. 228.

7- *bšnt hmkšm’ w’rb’yn wšb* “In the year five hundred and forty-seven.” The Seleucid year 547 corresponds to A.D. 235/6. This formula does not give the month name.

8- *byrh kwn qdm šnt hmkšm’ wšyn wtrtn* “In the month of Former *Kanun* of the year five hundred and fifty-two.” The Seleucid year 552 corresponds to A.D. 240/41. The month (*kwn qdm*) is equivalent to December and fell in A.D. 240.

9- *byrh ‘lwł šnt hmkšm’ wšyn wtltn* “In the month of *Elul* of the year five hundred and fifty-three.” The date 553 in the Seleucid Era corresponds to A.D. 241/242. *Elul* is the name of month equivalent to September, and *Elul* of the Seleucid year 553 fell in A.D. 242.

10- *byrh ‘yr šnt hmkšm’ wšyn w’rb’ hmnyn’ gdmyn* “In the month of *Iyyar*, the year five hundred and fifty-four in the former reckoning.” The year 554 in the Seleucid dating is A.D. 242/243, and the month of *Iyyar* (May) fell in A.D. 243.

It is striking that the system of writing the numbers in full has not been found in the dated Hatran inscriptions, but the year number is regularly given by means of numerical symbols. In Palmyrene, only a very few examples are attested (for example: CIS 4173 and 4174 from the year A.D.190/191). In certain dated Nabataean inscriptions, the year numbers are also written out in full.

It is noteworthy that the month names used in the Syriac inscriptions are of Babylonian origin. The Mesopotamians used astronomy to set the calendar. The Babylonian month names with little differences were also found in various Aramaic dialects, for example, in Nabataean, Palmyrene and Hatran inscriptions as the following Table shows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Babylonian</th>
<th>Syriac</th>
<th>Jewish</th>
<th>Nabataean</th>
<th>Palmyrene</th>
<th>Hatran</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan.</td>
<td><em>Tebeṭ</em></td>
<td>Kanun II</td>
<td><em>Tebeṭ</em></td>
<td><em>Tebeṭ</em></td>
<td><em>Tebeṭ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb.</td>
<td><em>Šebaṭ</em></td>
<td><em>Šebaṭ</em></td>
<td><em>Šebaṭ</em></td>
<td><em>Šebaṭ</em></td>
<td><em>Šebaṭ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar.</td>
<td>Adar</td>
<td>Adar</td>
<td>Adar</td>
<td>Adar</td>
<td>Adar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr.</td>
<td>Nisan</td>
<td>Nisan</td>
<td>Nisan</td>
<td>Nisan</td>
<td>Nisan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Iyyar</td>
<td>Iyyar</td>
<td>Iyyar</td>
<td>Iyyar</td>
<td>Iyyar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun.</td>
<td>Siwan</td>
<td>Hziran</td>
<td>Sivan</td>
<td>Siwan</td>
<td>Siwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul.</td>
<td><em>Tammuž</em></td>
<td><em>Tammuž</em></td>
<td><em>Tammuž</em></td>
<td>------</td>
<td>Qenyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug.</td>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>Ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep.</td>
<td>Elul</td>
<td>Illul</td>
<td>Illul</td>
<td>Illul</td>
<td>Illul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct.</td>
<td>Tišri</td>
<td>Tešri I</td>
<td>Tišri</td>
<td>Tešri</td>
<td>Tešri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.</td>
<td>Marhešwan</td>
<td>Tešri II</td>
<td>Marhešwan</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>Kanun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec.</td>
<td>Kislev</td>
<td>Kanun I</td>
<td>Kislev</td>
<td>Kislev</td>
<td>Kislev</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The Babylonian Months with Their Counterparts in the Different Aramaic Calendars

Months in the Babylonian calendar: see Contenau 1966, 227
Months in the different Aramaic calendars: see Brock 2001, 121
The Babylonian month-names survive today in the Jewish calendar and in the Syriac and Christian Arabic calendar. The lunar months used in Jewish and probably also in Nabataean, Palmyrene, and Hatran inscriptions do not show exact agreement with our present calendar. For example, the month of *Nisan* may begin in March. On the other hand, the Syriac months have exact correspondence with the Julian (or old) calendar.\(^{42}\)

**ALPHABET-BASED SYSTEM**

Through the course of time following the appearance of the pictographic systems, the first alphabet was invented in the Near East in the early second millennium B.C. The first alphabet is called Proto-Sinaitic or Proto-Canaanite and was used for the North West Semitic languages including Aramaic, Hebrew and Phoenician.\(^{43}\)

As far as the alphabet in the West is concerned, it seems that the earliest surviving inscriptions in Greek from the eighth century B.C. have a Semitic origin since most of the letter forms can be paralleled in the Phoenician and Aramaic scripts; also the letters follow the same basic alphabetic order, though some supplementary letters (in addition to the 22 Semitic letters) were developed and added to the alphabet. The derivation of the Greek letters from the Phoenicians is substantiated by similarities in their names, by their forms and by the alphabetic order.\(^{44}\) It appears that the Greeks used two different systems of numerals based on the letters of the alphabet. The older system, dating to the seventh century B.C., consists of acrophonic numerals, which means the initial letter of the word for the number is used as a sign for that numeral.\(^{45}\) In the other system, the Greeks attached, at least from the second century B.C., numerical values to each of the letters of the alphabet as they appear in the table below.\(^{46}\)

Under Greek influence the numeral system in Table 3 was adopted by Hebrew and Aramaic.\(^{47}\) In agreement with Hebrew, Arabic and Greek, the Classical Syriac alphabetic values of the twenty-two letters of the alphabet are represented as follows: the first

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Tens</th>
<th>Hundreds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α Alpha</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>ι Iota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β Beta</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>κ Kappa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γ Gamma</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Λ Lambda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δ Delta</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>μ Mu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ε Epsilon</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>ν Nu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ζ ζ Digamma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>ξ Kksi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ζ Zeta</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>ο Omicron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>η Eta</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>π Pi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>θ Theta</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>ϖ Koppa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Greek Alphabetic Numerals
nine letters of the alphabet (‘-t) have classical values 1-9, and the next nine letters (y-s) show the tens from 10-90, while the remaining four letters (q-t) represent hundreds from 100 to 400. The numbers from 500-900 are written as additive combinations of the signs for 400 with signs for the other hundreds. For example \( tq = 500 \) (400+100).

It has already been noted that the Old Syriac inscriptions from the first three centuries of our era reveal a system of numerical notation related to the Aramaic system. Afterwards, Syriac, under Greek influence, began to use the letters as number-signs, abandoning the cipher system to indicate the numerals probably by the end of the first half of the third century A.D. The Syriac letter-numeral system in the Syriac inscriptions is found for the first time in two third-century documents, where we find the numbers \( bn \) (52) and \( gn \) (53). Apart from these two documents, this system has not been found yet in the early Syriac materials. This gives us an indication that the letter-number system in Syriac had not, so far, become as common as in a later period.

SOME HISTORICAL INFORMATION IN THE EARLY DATED SYRIAC INSCRIPTIONS

The surviving inscriptions from Edessa and the rest of Osrhoene have historic significance and refer to some members of the ruling dynasty of the little kingdom of Osrhoene whose capital was at Edessa in Northern Mesopotamia. Seleucos I Nicator founded Edessa in 304 or 303 B.C. (possibly at the site of an earlier city). Although the early inhabitants of Edessa were mostly of Aramaean stock, the Arabs gradually came to form a considerable proportion of the population by the end of the Seleucid period. When the Seleucids withdrew to the west of the Euphrates, Edessa acquired a certain independence and a dynasty of Arab stock reigned over the city and the surrounding region from about 132 B.C., starting with king Aryu (132-127 B.C.).

The title šlyt’ d’rb “governor of ‘Arab” appears only in one dated inscription from A.D. 165 found at the Sumatar Harabesi (situated approximately 60 km south-east of Edessa). The inscription reads:

1- byrh šbt šnt 476
2- ‘n’ tyrdt br ‘dwn’ šlyt’ d’rb
3- bnyt ‘lt’ hd’ w šnt neph’ lmrh’
4- ‘l hyy mry mk’ ...........

1- In the month of šebat of the year 476
2- I, Tridates son of Adona, governor of ‘Arab
3- Built this altar and set up a pillar for Maralahe
4- For the life of my lord the king…….

In this inscription the governor of ‘Arab (šlyt’ d’rb) prays for the life of his lord the king and his sons, referring to Wa’el, son of Sahru, the pro-Parthian king of Edessa who reigned over Edessa for two years from 162/3 to 164/5. Further evidence exists for Wa’el the king on bronze coins with his bust and his name in Syriac script and Vologeses IV of Parthia (148-93) portrayed on the obvers.

A group of undated Syriac tomb inscriptions also at Sumatar shows local officials, presumably under the kings, with the title šlyt’ d’rb. The persons who held this title are Wa’el son of Wa’el, Barnahar son of Dini and Abgar. The word ‘rb is taken by Drijvers to mean the region of desert area around Edessa to the Tigris, where “the ruler
of the Arabs” was in charge of the Arab tribes on behalf of the king of Edessa.61 Ross, however, stated that “the most conservative approach is to conclude that 'Arab designates a fairly restricted area around Tella and Rhesaina.”62

Among the corpus of the dated Syriac inscriptions is the most ancient Syriac tomb text discovered so far.63 It was found in the modern Birecik on the left bank of the Euphrates. This inscription records that the tomb was erected in A.D. 6 by an important local figure who was in command of Birtha (šlyt `dbyrt’), presumably the place on the site of Birecik which was part of Abgar’s kingdom of Osrhoene. It remains plausible that this person, Zarbiyan son of Abgar, is not an independent local ruler, but an official of the kingdom.64

Another Syriac tomb inscription from Serrin (on the other side of the Euphrates, south of Birecik) of a religious functionary was dedicated in A.D. 73 by a man who also has a characteristic Edessan name, Ma’nu son of Ma’nu, with the non-religious title qšyš’ “elder”65 and the religious title bdr dnh. The exact meaning of the term bdr has not yet been adequately explained.66 It could be a name of a religious functionary.67 The inscription is of a common type that indicates the continuation of the tradition of respect for burial-places and avoidance of their violation. It invokes a curse on any person who disturbs the dead man’s remains and violators of the tomb are threatened with having no offspring to throw dust on their eyes, i.e. to fulfill the usual funerary rites, and with not getting a tomb themselves.68

The best-known king of Edessa, Abgar VIII the Great, son of Ma’nu, ruled for thirty-five years, perhaps from 176/177–211/212. Abgar VIII called himself Septimius and there are coins with the portraits of king Abgar and Septimius Severus.69 Although there is no direct reference to him in the dated Syriac inscriptions, he is probably represented at the center of a tomb-mosaic inscription discovered by Drijvers in 1979 in Şehitilik Mahallesi north of Edessa. This mosaic shows five people in two rows within a decorated framework. The significance of the inscription lies in the reference to Abgar, son of Ma’nu, the iconography of whose representation indicates that he was of royal rank.70 On the basis of the script and content, this mosaic is probably to be assigned to the first half of the third century. It is likely, therefore, that the king is Abgar VIII, known as Abgar the Great.71 The inscription reads:

1- ‘n’ brsmy’ br
2- šdw ‘bd ly
3- byt ‘lm’ ln
4- ly wlbny wilh
5- ‘ly yyy bgr
6- mry w’bd tby

1- I, Barsimya son of
2- Ašdw, made for myself
3- this house of eternity
4- for myself and for my children and
   for my brothers
5- for the life of Abgar
6- my lord and benefactor.72

There are some doubts raised about the identification of this Abgar with the famous king Abgar VIII the Great73 who died in 212 and was succeeded by his son Abgar IX Severus who reigned till 213.74 In that year, Caracalla summoned the Edessan king Abgar and his sons to Rome where they were murdered; therefore the year 212/213 was to be regarded as the first year of “liberation” of Edessa and from that date Edessa was
proclaimed a Roman *colonia.* The colony carried the names Marcia, Aurelia, Antoniana, Metropolitan and later Alexandria combined in various ways. The local dynasty returned briefly in 239-240 and around 240 the last member of the dynasty was granted the privilege of bearing the title “king” once again. This was indicated in the Syriac legal documents dated from A.D. 240: “In the second year of Aelius Septimius Abgar the king.” Edessa reverted to being a colony in A.D. 241.

Some features of the ordinary life of the people of Edessa and Osroene in the early years of 240s are reflected in three legal documents. The first document records the sale of a slave-girl which turned up in the excavation of Dura-Europos, but it was written in Edessa on 9th May (Iyyar) A.D. 243. The earlier of two new Syriac legal documents is dated 28th December (Kanun qdam) A.D. 240 when Edessa enjoyed a short period of the restored monarchy during the reign of Septimius Abgar. It is related to a transfer of debt. The second new document, which dates from 1st September (Elul) A.D. 242 concerns a lease of repossessed property. Around this time, it appears that Edessa had reverted to being a *colonia* and the name of the Edessan king is not mentioned any more.

These three dated Syriac documents, besides the inscriptions, present historical information on political and social matters as well as on the way of life of the people of Edessa, using dating according to various eras and other markers.

I- The Seleucid Era. The early Syriac inscriptions including the three documents from the A.D. 240s are usually dated according to the Seleucid era which began in October 312-311 B.C. In order to calculate the corresponding Christian (or Common Era) date, it is thus necessary to subtract 311, or 312 if the month is October, November, or December. The Seleucid era is referred to as *mnyn’ qdmy’* “the former reckoning,” presumably in contrast to the Roman or Parthian system of chronology. The Seleucid date is also found with *dywny’* “of the Greeks,” as in the document of A.D. 242: *byrh’ lwł šnt gn whmšm’* *dywny’* “In the month of Elul of the year five hundred and fifty of the Greeks.” In Mesopotamia, dating by the Seleucid era was standard and continued in use until it was replaced by the Muslim system of dating.

II- One document names the year after the king who was then ruling and numbers it according to years of that monarch’s reign. This kind of information, indicating the ruling years of the king, is represented by the legal document of A.D. 240:

3- *whšt tnty d’lyws spłmyws ’bgr mlk’
4- *br m’nw psgrby’ br ’bgr mlk’ ……..
6- *ktyb šfr’ hn’ bhylk’ krk’ hdlt’ dsyd’ d’bgr mlk’
3-….. and in the second year of Aelius Septimius Abgar the king
4- son of Ma’nu, crown prince, son of Abgar the king……..
6- this document was written in Haykla New Town of Hunting, of Abgar the king

This document refers to the second year of Aelius Septimius Abgar X son of Ma’nu the crown-prince, who reigned from A.D. 239 to 241 after the Romans reinstated the dynasty. There is no further mention of the title king under Roman rule as part of the province of Mesopotamia. The text shows also that the father of the
king Abgar had been a Ma’nu ps̄gryb’ (an Iranian term for a particular official, something similar to the crown-prince, heir-apparent), son of Abgar the king, who was the highest-ranking officer in the kingdom for twenty-six years from A.D. 213 to 239, but he had not in fact been a reigning king. Perhaps this Ma’nu ps̄gryb’ who appears in the undated Syriac inscription from the citadel of Edessa is the father of Queen Šalmat:

1- ’n’ ṣptw’h’
2- nw[hdr’] br
3- brs[---] ḫbdt
4- ’ṣtwn’ ḫn’
5- w’dṛṭ d’l mnḥ
6- lšımt mlkt’ bṛt
7- m’nw ps̄gryb’

1- I, Aptuḥa
2- com[mant], son of
3- ………Sade
4- this column
5- and the statue above it
6- for Šalmat, the queen, daughter of
7- Ma’nū, the crown prince

III- The year might also be named after an important event that had occurred. This is clear in two of the Syriac documents, where the era in which Edessa became a Roman colony in 212/213 is designated as that of its freedom, probably freedom from its local dynasty. The date 212/213, therefore, was regarded later as the first year of the “liberation” (dhrwyr’) of Edessa. Hence the Seleucid year 553 (A.D. 242/243) as year 30 of the liberation of Antoniana Edessa:

2- ……… byryḥ ’yr ʾṣnt
3- ḫmšm’ ṭwmsyn w’rb’ bmnyn’ qdmy’ ḫbšnt ʾtlyn dḥrwyr’d ʾntwnyn’ ḫsṣnt’
4- qdwyn’

2- ……… in the month of Elul of the year five hundred
3- and fifty-three in the former reckoning, in the year thirty of the liberation of Antoniana Edessa the glorious
4- colony

The document P1:2-4102 refers to the Seleucid year 554 (A.D. 242/234) as year 31 of the liberation of Edessa:

2- … byryḥ ’ḥmr’ ṭyn’
3- ḫmšm’ ṭwmsyn w’rb’ bmnyn’ qdmy’ ḫbšnt ʾtlyn dḥrwyr’y ṭyn’
4- d’ntwnyn’ ḫsṣnt’ qdwyn’……
5- … in the month of ḫywr’, the year
6- three hundred and fifty four in the former reckoning, and in the year thirty-one of the liberation
7- of Antoniana Edessa the glorious colonia………..

IV- The two documents from 242 and 243 also present dating by the eponymous priest, Marcus Aurelius:

4- ……… bk̄mrw’
5- dmqrws ʾwṛlyws………..
4-………… in the priesthood of
5- Marcus Aurelius………..

V- The document of A.D.243 appears also to identity the year by the name of the principal magistrate, as in many Greek cities. The document shows that Edessa, after the Romans ended the dynasty, was administered by two annual magistrates (at this time Aurelius Abgar son of Ma’nū and Abgar son of Hapsay) denoted by the borrowed Greek term strategia:

5- … wb ʾstrgwt’ dmqrw[s]
6- ṭwrlyws ṭbgr…… ʾw ʾbr ḫpsy
5- and in the strategos-ship of
6- Aurelius Abgar … … and Abgar son of Hapsay.
VI- The three documents of the 240s show dating by regnal years of the emperor Gordian III (238-244). Under Roman rule down to the time of the emperor Diocletian, it seems that the people of Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Arabia used dating by regnal years of the monarch ruling over them. For example:

1- bšnt št d’wqrtywr qsr mrqws ‘ntwyws grdynws wšbws ‘wtykwys
2- sbstws

1- In the year six of Autokrator Caesar Marcus Antonius Gordianus Eusebes Eutuches
2- Sebastos.

VII- Dating by “consulship” (hpty’) is also known with the names of the consuls of the year in question:

bhpty’ ‘nyws ‘rayws wdrbyhwnyws ppws
“In the consulship of Annius Arrianus and of Cervonius Papus.”

The other document is dated by the consuls of the year 242:

bhpty’ dwlyws ‘tyqws wdlpydws prkt’yws
“In the consulate of Vettius Atticus and of Lapidus Praetextatus…..”

VIII- As a part of its dating, the document of the year A.D. 242 is assigned to the archonship (’rkwnwt’) of Marcus Aurelius Alexandros son of Severus and Bar’ata son of Šalamsin. An archon was another local official.

It can be deduced from what has been observed in the three legal documents that in Edessa as in many Greek cities it was the custom to mark years by the name of high officials for that year.

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DATING FORMULAE

Most of the dates in the Old Syriac inscriptions appear at the beginning of the inscriptions and the same is true of the three third-century documents. The dating formulae in the available texts may be classified in three categories:

A- Using the year alone with numbers written out, for example:

1- bšnt št d’wqrtywr qsr mrqws ‘ntwyws grdynws ‘ntwyws’
1- In the year five hundred and forty-seven

In the legal documents of the third century A.D., this same formula emerges for the regnal years of the emperor Gordian III.

1- bšnt št d’wqrtywr qsr mrqws ‘ntwyws grdynws’
1- In the year six of Autokrator Caesar Marcus Antonius Gordianus

1- ......bšnt
2- tlt d’wqrtywr qsr mrqws
1- ..... In the third year
2- of Autokrator Caesar Antonius Gordianus

1- bšnt hmṡ ‘r ‘wqrtywr qsr mrqws ‘ntwyws
1- ...... In the fifth year of Autokrator Caesar Antonius Gordianus…..

In one example in this category the word “year” is not mentioned:

1- bhṁsm “ wdlkšr’
1- In [the year] five hundred and thirteen

B- Using the month name with the year. This is by far the most common formula with some seven inscriptions using it:
Numbers and Dating Formulae in the Old Syriac Inscriptions

1- byrh 'dr šn 317
1- In the month of Adar of the year 317.

1- byrh tšry qdm šnt 384
1- In the month of Former Tešri of the year 385.

1- byrh šbt šnt 476
1- In the month of Šebat of the year 476.

1- byrh 'dr šnt šryn
1- In the month of Adar of the year (five hundred) and twenty.

1- byrh 'b šnt […]m’ […]t wtš’
1- In the month of Ab of the year … hundred and … nine.

1- byrh nysn
2- šnt hmšm’
3- wtltyn whmš
1- In the month of Nisan
2- of the year five hundred
3- and thirty five.

1- byrh tmwz šnt tltyn
2- wtš’ ……
1- In the month of Tammuz of the year thirty
2- nine.

One example occurs with the word yrh “month” after the year number:

1- bšbt šnt 476 byrh
1- in (the month of) Šebat of the year 476.

C- Using the month name, the year and the day of the month. This formula is less common in the Old Syriac. It occurs in the three legal documents of the third century. Examples are:

2- … byrh ‘yr šnt
3- hmšm’’ whmšym w’rb’
7- ……bywm tš’……
2- …… in the month of Iyyar, the year
3- five hundred and fifty-four
7-……on the ninth day……

1- byrh knwn qdm šnt hmšm’’ whmšyn

wrtyn
7- byum tmny’ w’ šryn
1- In the month of Former Kanun of the year five hundred and fifty-two
7- on the twenty-eighth day.
2- byrh ‘lw šnt hmšm
3- whmšyn wtlt
6- …… bywm ḥd byrh’
2- In the month of Elul of the year five hundred
3- and fifty-three
6- on the first day of the month.

The formula containing day, month, and year is attested in one of the Syriac inscriptions at the end of the text as opposed to the beginning:

2- ……bywm 13
3- b’dr šnt 476
2- …… on the 13th day
3- of Adar of the year 476.

It would appear that the dating formulae used in Old Syriac are in general related to the various patterns in Palmyrene, Nabataean, and Hatran concerning the position of dating formulae, numerical symbols, numbers written out and the different formulae.

CONCLUSION

The Old Syriac inscriptions of the first three centuries A.D. demonstrate various kinds of numeral systems, using them mainly in dating formulae. Numbers are represented by numeral symbols or ciphers, numbers written out in full, and alphabetic symbols.

- By the first and second centuries A.D., in Old Syriac (like other Middle Aramaic dialects in Palmyra, Petra and Hatra), the single vertical stroke was used to represent the unit, extending to 9 by repetition of the strokes (though a sepa-
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- A special sign was used for 10 and also for 20, whereas all other numbers from 1 to 99 could be denoted by the repetition of the basic signs.

- Numbers written out in full appeared in Old Syriac inscriptions from the second century A.D. i.e. 187-88 at latest. This system was also employed in Palmyrene and Nabataean but not in Hatran.

- The early Syriac documents from the third century A.D. offer two examples of the alphabetic numerical system which reflect to a certain extent the fact that Syriac under Greek influence began to use the letters as number signs probably as early as the first half of the third century.

- For dating in the early Syriac inscriptions as well as in Palmyrene and Hatran, the Seleucid era is used in contrast to other systems of chronology, Parthian or Roman.

- The dating system has a variety of forms in the legal documents of the 240s. The dates relate to political, social and religious conditions in Edessa at that time. Apart from the use of the Seleucid era as a reference point, the kinds of the dates in these legal documents do not appear the Syriac inscriptions.

As far as the study of Syriac historiography is concerned, the Old Syriac inscriptions, including the Syriac legal documents of the third century of our era, form one of the sources for the study of Edessa’s significant history.
*I wish to express my deepest gratitude and sincere thanks to Professors John F. Healey and Geoffrey Greatrex. Each of them has been most generous with suggestions and assistance.


6 Saggs 1989, 222.


8 Saggs 1962, 445- 447.

9 Saggs 1989, 223.


16 *Ibid.*, As 55; Bs 2.

17 *Ibid.*, As 29; A 36; As 37.


24 See note 10 above.

25 Drijvers and Healey 1999, As 41.

26 *Ibid.*, 120.


33 *Ibid.*, Am 9


42 S.P. Brock and D. Taylor, *The Hidden
Numbers and Dating Formulae in the Old Syriac Inscriptions


47 Healey 1990, 60.
48 Ibid., 60; Brock 2001, 58.
49 Healey 1990, 60.

51 Drijvers and Healey 1999, 237, 243.
56 Segal 1970, 23.
59 Drijvers and Healey, As 47, AS 49, AS 51, AS 52; Millar 1993, 475.
60 Drijvers 1980, 130.
63 Drijvers and Healey 1999, As 55.
65 Drijvers and Healey 1999, 195.
69 Drijvers 1980, 14.
72 Drijvers and Healey 1999, 37 and Am10 pl.55.
74 Drijvers 1980, 14.
75 Ibid., 14-5.
76 Segal 1970, 14; Ross 2001, 59.
78 Dijkstra 1995, 252.
79 Drijvers and Healey 1999, P2;3; Brock 1991, 265.
81 Drijvers and Healey 1999, P1.
82 Brock 2001, 159.
83 Drijvers and Healey 1999, P2.
84 Ibid., P3.
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87 Drijvers and Healey 1999, P1:3; P3:3.
89 Drijvers and Healey 1999, P3: i.
90 Millar 1993, 458.
91 Segal 1970, 10.
92 Drijvers and Healey 1999, P2.
94 Segal 1970, 19.
98 Segal 1970, 14-5.
99 Millar 1993, 476.
100 Drijvers and Healey 1999, 243.
101 Millar 1993, 476.
103 Ibid., P1:4; P3:4.
104 Cook 1990, 268.
106 Drijvers and Healey 1999, P1:5-6.
107 Goldstein 1966, 8.
110 Ibid., P3:2.
111 Ibid., P3:5-6.
113 Brock 1992, 253-61, gives notes on the dating formulae in the main Middle Aramaic dialects i.e. Palmyrene, Nabataean, Hatran, and Old Syriac.
115 Brock 1992, 257.
116 Drijvers and Healey 1999, P1.
117 Ibid., P2.
118 Ibid., P3.
119 Ibid., As 16.
120 Ibid., As 55.
121 Ibid., Bs2.
122 Ibid., As 36.
123 Ibid., As 9.
124 Ibid., Am8.
125 Ibid., Am9.
126 Ibid., Am7.
127 Ibid., As 37, though there is considerable difficulty about the reading of byrḥ.
128 Ibid., P1.
129 Ibid., P2.
130 Ibid., P3.
131 Ibid., As 29.