Classical Syriac

Estrangela Script

Chapter 2

(Last updated December 8, 2022)

2.1. Introduction to Vowels in Classical Syriac[1]

Like earlier forms of Aramaic, Classical Syriac was originally written without a full system of vowels to represent the various vowel sounds that were used when texts were spoken out loud. This means that apart from two consonants that were sometimes used to represent vowel sounds (ܐ, ܝ, and sometimes ܪ), the reader would have to supply their own vowels based on context and their previous knowledge of the language. This can be illustrated using the following sentence in English written without vowels:

t s nt mpssbl t rd sntncs n nglsh wtht vwls.

When written without vowels, the meaning of this sentence would be unclear to someone who does not know English well. However, if the reader knows English well, they can supply their own vowels and figure out the meaning of the sentence:

It is not impossible to read sentences in English without vowels.

Two separate systems were eventually developed to represent the various vowel sounds that can be used when Classical Syriac texts are read out loud. The system used in this textbook has

[1] Cf. Nöldeke §§6–9; Muraoka §4; Duval §§42–50, 63–69; Brockelmann §4.

several names: the East Syriac, eastern, or Nestorian.[2] The other system is referred to as the West Syriac, western, or Jacobite.[3]

2.2. Vowels in East Syriac[4]

The following chart provides both the forms and sounds of the various vowel signs that are used in East Syriac. The first column provides the Syriac name for each vowel (both in the Estrangela script and in transliteration[5]), the second provides the forms for each vowel, the third shows what these vowels look like when written with the letter ܠ, the fourth provides the transliteration for each vowel, and the fifth provides an approximation for what these vowels sound like in East Syriac:

Table 2.1 – Syriac Vowels

Name	Freestanding	With ܠ	Transliteration	Sound
ܦܬܵܚܵܐ | pṯāḥāʾ	◌	◌	a	*a* as in *hat*[6]
ܙܩܳܦܳܐ | zqāp̄āʾ	◌	◌	ā	*a* as in *father*[7]
ܙܠܵܡܵܐ ܦܫܺܝܩܳܐ | zlāmāʾ pšîqāʾ	◌	◌	e	*e* as in *bet*[8]
ܙܠܵܡܵܐ ܩܲܫܝܵܐ | zlāmāʾ qašyāʾ	◌	◌	ē	*ey* as in *they*
ܗܒܵܨܵܐ | ḥbāṣāʾ	◌ or ◌	◌ or ◌	î[9] or ī	*ee* as in *meet*

[2] Note that that the term *Nestorian* is considered to be pejorative and should normally be avoided when describing both the vowels and the distinctive script used in East Syriac. The East Syriac system has been chosen since it is the oldest of the two systems, it preserves more vowel sounds than the West Syriac system (seven vs. five), and it fits more naturally with the Estrangela script.

[3] The term *Jacobite* should also be avoided when describing both the vowels and the distinctive script used in West Syriac.

[4] Cf. Nöldeke §§4–5, 8, 44; Muraoka §4; Duval §§55–59, 61, 70–71, 76–80; Mingana §§14–15, 20–23 ; Brockelmann §§4, 7

[5] Note that this chart only gives one name for each vowel. Several vowels have more than one possible name and sometimes have different names in West Syriac.

[6] This is only an approximation for English speakers. The pṯāḥāʾ is pronounced the same way as the name of the letter "a" in French. For a useful video showing the pronunciation of vowels in East Syriac see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76-ZSAE_VOo&t=175s and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbalA-VxeAs&t=35s. Note that the presenter in the second video makes his presentation in a modern dialect of Aramaic (referred to in the video description as the Assyrian language) but his presentation on the pronunciation of the vowels is quite clear.

[7] Note that this vowel is pronounced as an *o* as in *note* in West Syriac. This is one of the most notable differences between West Syriac and East Syriac due to the fact that zqāp̄āʾ is one of the most common vowel sounds in Classical Syriac.

[8] For students who know Hebrew, the length of this vowel can be confusing. In Hebrew, the vowel ◌ represents an *ey* sound as in *they*. In Classical Syriac, however, ◌ represents a short *e* sound as in *bet*.

[9] Note that the circumflex accent used here does not indicate vowel length but the fact that the vowel is written with a helping consonant. The same principle applies to the next two vowels. This way of representing vowels in Classical Syriac is unique to this textbook but follows the standard way of representing similar vowels in Hebrew. The goal is to be able to take a transliterated text and reproduce the exact forms that are found in the Syriac text.

ܪܘܳܚܳܐ	rwāḥāʾ	◌ܳ	◌ܲ	ô	*o* as in *note*
ܪ◌ܒ◌ܺܝ◌ܫ◌ܳܐ	rb̲āṣāʾ[10]	◌ܵ or ◌ܶ	◌ܲ◌ܹ or ◌ܒ◌ܽ	û or ū	*oo* as in *moo*

Note that three vowels in East Syriac (◌ܶ, ◌ܳ, and ◌ܵ) are formed using a combination of consonants and vowel dots.[11] As in earlier forms of Aramaic, ܝ and ܐ were used to represent long vowels and parts of words that were pronounced in an earlier stage of the language as part of a diphthong before a full system of vowels was developed much later on. Eventually, virtually every ḥb̲āṣāʾ, rwāḥāʾ, and rb̲āṣāʾ sound was represented in the script using ܝ or ܐ. This means that in unvocalized texts (i.e. texts that do not have vowel points), the vowel sounds made by ḥb̲āṣāʾ, rwāḥāʾ, and rb̲āṣāʾ are fairly easy to recognize.

When ܝ functions as a consonant but is preceded by ḥb̲āṣāʾ, the dot of the ḥb̲āṣāʾ can be written under the previous letter without a helping consonant (ܢ◌ܒ◌ܺܝ◌ܐ, "prophets") or under the ܝ itself (ܢ◌ܒ◌ܺܝ◌ܐ, "prophet").

In fully vocalized texts, rwāḥāʾ and rb̲āṣāʾ are always written with their respective helping consonants except with the words ܟܠ (*kūl*) and ◌ܡ◌ܶܛ◌ܛ◌ܽܠ (*meṭṭūl*).[12] In early Syriac texts, the sounds made by rwāḥāʾ and rb̲āṣāʾ were sometimes not indicated by a helping consonant. When this happens, the words are said to have been written defectively.

In most cases, the letter ܐ functions as a consonant. This is also the case when ܐ has lost its pronunciation—the ܐ is preserved to indicate the historical spelling of the word,[13] the historical spelling of a grammatical feature,[14] or simply to indicate that the ܐ would be pronounced in other grammatical circumstances.[15] In some cases, however, ܐ functions as a helping consonant and represents the same sound that is produced by zqāp̲āʾ. This happens especially in words that have been borrowed from Greek (e.g. ◌ܦ◌ܳ◌ܣ◌ܛ◌ܺ◌ܝ◌ܩ◌ܳ◌ܢ).

[10] This vowel is also referred to as ◌ܐ◌ܳ◌ܨ◌ܺ◌ܝ◌ܬ◌ܳ (ʿṣāṣāʾ)

[11] These consonants are traditionally referred to in Latin as *matres lectionis* ("mothers of reading") and individually as a *mater lectionis*. In this textbook, we will refer to them as *helping consonants*.

[12] Note that these words can also be written with helping consonants.

[13] E.g. ◌ܡ◌ܰ◌ܠ◌ܰ◌ܐ◌ܟ◌ܳ (ʾmālāk, "angel").

[14] E.g. the ܐ at the end of virtually every noun. This feature likely originated as a deictic (i.e. pointing) particle in an earlier period of Aramaic (הָא, *hāʾ*, "behold") that was added to the end of a noun. In Hebrew, this became a definite article that could be attached to the beginning of a word. See Na'ama Pat-El, "The Development of the Semitic Definite Article: A Syntactic Approach," *JSS* 54 (2009), 40–41.

[15] This happens quite frequently when inseparable prepositions, the particle ܕ, or the conjunction ܘ are added to a word that begins with ܐ. See §§3.3–3.5.

2.3. The BeGaDKePhaT Letters, Qûššāyāʾ, and Rûkkāk̲āʾ[16]

As we saw in chapter 1, six consonants in Classical Syriac have a dual pronunciation. These are known as the BeGaDKePhaT letters (ܒ, ܓ, ܕ, ܟ, ܦ, ܬ). The first pronunciation (i.e. the hard pronunciation) is normally used when the letter is *not* preceded by a vowel sound. The second pronunciation (i.e. the soft or spirantized pronunciation) is normally used when the letter *is* preceded by a vowel sound, even if the vowel sound is found in the previous word. The following chart provides the transliterations and pronunciations for the BeGaDKePhaT letters when they (a) have the hard pronunciation and (b) have the soft pronunciation:

Table 2.2 - BeGaDKePhaT Letters

	Transliteration		Pronunciation	
Letter	**Hard Pronunciation**	**Soft Pronunciation**	**Hard Pronunciation**	**Soft Pronunciation**
ܒ	b	b̲	b (boy)	v (vile)[17]
ܓ	g	g̲	g (girl)	gurgle sound[18]
ܕ	d	d̲	d (day)	voiced th (the)
ܟ	k	k̲	k (kite)	ch (Ger. acht) [19]
ܦ	p	p̲	p (put)	f (fight)[20]
ܬ	t	t̲	t (tall)	unvoiced th (thin)

In fully vocalized texts, the BeGaDKePhaT letters are sometimes accompanied by dots to indicate whether they have the hard pronunciation or the soft pronunciation. When the letter has a hard pronunciation, the dot is written above the letter (◌̈) and is called a ***qûššāyāʾ***. When the letter has a soft pronunciation, the dot is written below the letter (◌̤) and is called a ***rûkkāk̲āʾ***. Note the following examples:

[16] Cf. Nöldeke §§2, 15, 23, 24; Muraoka §§3, 5a, 6H, 9; Duval §§119–135; Mingana §§3–4; Brockelmann §10, 63.

[17] Note that East Syriac eventually began to use a *w* sound for the soft pronunciation of ܒ based on the spoken vernacular. See Geoffrey Khan, "Aramaic in the Medieval and Modern Periods," in *Languages of Iraq, Ancient and Modern*, ed. J. N. Postgate (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2007), 110. In this textbook, we will continue to use a *v* sound for the soft pronunciation. West Syriac no longer makes a distinction between the hard pronunciation and soft pronunciation of ܒ—the hard pronunciation is used whenever ܒ occurs.

[18] As we saw in chapter 1, this is referred to as a voiced velar fricative (ɣ).For a convenient recording of this sound, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voiced_velar_fricative.

[19] As we saw in chapter 1, this is referred to as a voiceless velar fricative (x). For a convenient recording of this sound, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voiceless_velar_fricative.

[20] Note that East Syriac eventually began to pronounce ܦ with a hard pronunciation even when it should have had a soft pronunciation. In this textbook, we will continue to pronounce it with a soft pronunciation when appropriate. Note also that in some cases, ܦ is pronounced as a *w* in East Syriac. See §1.4.

Table 2.3 - *Qûššāyā*ʾ and *Rûkkāḵā*ʾ		
Word	**Transliteration**	**Meaning**
ܡܰܠܟ݁ܳܐ	malkāʾ	king
ܒ݁ܪܳܐ	brāʾ	son
ܐܺܝܕ݂ܳܐ	ʾîḏāʾ	hand
ܐܶܬ݂ܳܐ	ʾeṯāʾ	he came

BeGaDKePhaT letters can also take a qûššāyāʾ when the letter has been doubled, keeping in mind that doubled letters are normally not written separately in Classical Syriac. When BeGaDKePhaT letters are doubled, they are pronounced with the hard pronunciation even if they are preceded by a vowel sound. See the discussion below in section 2.6.

BeGaDKePhaT letters have a hard pronunciation at the beginning of a sentence or at the beginning of a sentence division, even if the previous word ended in a vowel sound. Sentences and sentence divisions are indicated by hard periods (❖), soft periods (.), and even points (:).[21] Note the following examples:

Table 2.4 - *Qûššāyā*ʾ and *Rûkkākā*ʾ in Relation to Previous Words	
Example	**Explanation**
ܟ݁ܬ݂ܳܒ݂ܳܐ ܕ݂ܺܝܠܺܝܕ݂ܽܘܬ݂ܶܗ	The ܕ at the beginning of the second word has the soft pronunciation because the previous word ends in a vowel sound.[22]
ܡܫܺܝܚܳܐ. ܒ݁ܪܶܗ	The ܒ has the hard pronunciation because it is separated from the previous word by a soft period.
ܛܰܠܝܳܐ ❖ ܟ݁ܕ݂	The ܟ has the hard pronunciation because it is separated from the previous word by a hard period.
ܕ݂ܺܝܗܽܘܕ݂ܳܐ: ܒ݁ܝܰܘܡܰܝ	The ܒ has the hard pronunciation because it is separated from the previous word by even points.

While the rules given above for the hard and soft pronunciations of BeGaDKePhaT letters are very consistent in Classical Syriac, there are several cases when either the hard or soft pronunciation is used that go against these rules. This happens most commonly when inseparable prepositions (ܒ, ܠ), the conjunction ܘ, or the particle ܕ are attached to a word when (a) the second letter of the word is a BeGaDKePhaT letter and (b) the first letter of the word does not have a vowel (e.g. ܡܕ݂ܺܝܢ̄ܬ݂ܳܐ, ܟ݁ܬ݂ܳܒ݂ܳܐ). In this situation, the second letter continues to be pronounced with the soft pronunciation even though it should have a hard pronunciation

[21] Hard periods, soft periods, and even points will be discussed in §3.1.

[22] Since the ܐ does not make a sound, the syllable ends in a vowel sound. Note that this does not apply to the letters ܗ or ܝ.

according to the rules given above (e.g. ܟܬܒܬܐ, ܟܬܒܐ).[23] This also happens in some cases when an earlier pronunciation of the word would have required the BeGaDKePhaT letter to have the soft pronunciation (i.e. a vowel sound *used to* come before the letter) (e.g. ܕܗܒܐ, "gold" from ܕܗܒܐ, *dahăb̲āʾ*). Other exceptions will be discussed as they are encountered.

2.4. Consonant Clusters and Syllable Division[24]

Consonant clusters occur when two consonants appear side-by-side with no vowel between them.[25] When a word in Classical Syriac has a consonant cluster it is important to know whether the two letters are part of the same syllable and should be pronounced together (e.g. the *sm* in *small*) or whether they form the boundary between two syllables and should be pronounced separately (e.g. the *ct* in *lactose*).

The following rules can be used to determine whether a particular consonant cluster should be pronounced together or separately:

- **If the consonant cluster occurs at the beginning of a word, the two consonants should be pronounced together (e.g. ܩܛܠ – q$^{(e)}$ṭal).[26]**

- **If the constant cluster occurs at the end of a word, the two consonants should be pronounced together (e.g. ܩܛܠܬ - q$^{(e)}$ṭalt).**

- **If the consonant cluster appears in the middle of the word and is preceded by a short vowel, the consonant cluster forms the boundary between two syllables and the two letters should be pronounced separately (e.g. ܡܠܟܐ – mal-kāʾ).**

- **If the consonant cluster appears in the middle of the word and is preceded by a long vowel, the two letters are part of the same syllable and should be pronounced together (e.g. ܡܘܡܬܢܐ – mû-m$^{(e)}$t̲ā-nāʾ).**

Note that BeGaDKePhaT letters that appear as the final letter of a consonant cluster at the end of a word will be pronounced with a hard pronunciation since no vowel sound comes before it (e.g. ܩܛܠܬ – q$^{(e)}$ṭalt). BeGaDKePhaT letters that appear as the second letter of a consonant cluster at the beginning of a word will be pronounced with the soft pronunciation since they are preceded by a slight, though unmarked, "e" sound (e.g. ܟܬܒ – k$^{(e)}$t̲ab̲).

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[23] This will be discussed further in chapter 3.
[24] Cf. Nöldeke §§4, 11, 21, 42–43; Muraoka §6F; Duval §§44, 54, 78, 80–82, 94–103; Mingana §§31–36; Brockelmann §§43–46.
[25] This should be distinguished from a *digraph* in English where two consonants are used side-by-side to produce a single consonant sound (e.g. the *ck* in *luck* or the *sh* in *ship*). Digraphs do not occur in Classical Syriac.
[26] In transliteration, we will use a superscript *e* in brackets to indicate the slight "e" sound (shewa) between the first and second letter of the consonant cluster. The "e" is enclosed in brackets since this sound is not indicated in the script used in this textbook. This is a useful concept since the presence of the slight "e" sound will have an effect on how the BeGaDKePhaT letters are pronounced when they are part of a consonant cluster. See below.

The following chart classifies East Syriac vowels as short or long, which is helpful for knowing whether or not to divide consonant clusters in the middle of a word:

Table 2.5 – Vowel Length	
Short Vowels	**Long Vowels**
◌ِ	◌ِي
◌ُ	◌ُو
sometimes ◌ِ	◌ِ
sometimes ◌َ	◌َ
sometimes ◌ِ	◌ِ

As indicated in the chart, vowels written with ◌َ or ◌ِ are normally long but are sometimes used to represent short vowels. When ◌َ or ◌ِ are used to represent short vowels, they are sometimes referred to as historically short vowels. When used to represent long vowels, they are sometimes referred to as historically long vowels. Historically short vowels are vowels that act like short vowels for the purpose of dividing syllables despite the fact that they are pronounced the same as their equivalent long vowel in the chart given above. The reason for this is that in earlier stages of Aramaic, historically short vowels would have been pronounced as short vowels. Some historically short vowels can be identified quite easily in fully vocalized texts because when they come before a BeGaDKePhaT letter, the BeGaDKePhaT letter will have the hard pronunciation (e.g. ܩܘܕܫܐ, *qûdd$^{(e)}$šā^{ʔ}*). In other cases, they simply need to be learned on a case-by-case basis.

The following chart illustrates the rules for dividing consonant clusters and how this affects the pronunciation of the BeGaDKePhaT letters:

Table 2.6 – Consonant Cluster Syllable Division				
Situation	**Word**	**Syllable Division**	**Transliteration**	**Meaning**
Long Vowel	ܐܘܡܬܐ	ܐܘ | ܡܬܐ	ʔû-m$^{(e)}$t̲āʔ	people, nation
Short Vowel[27]	ܐܘܪܟܐ	ܐܘܪ | ܟܐ	ʔûr-kāʔ	length
Short Vowel	ܒܝܪܬܐ	ܒܝ | ܪܬܐ	bîr-tāʔ	palace, fortress
Beginning	ܚܛܝܬܐ	ܚܛ | ܝܬܐ	ḥṭî-t̲āʔ	sin
Beg. and End	ܟܬܒܬ	ܟ | ܬܒ | ܬ	k$^{(e)}$t̲ab̲t	you wrote

[27] Note that this is one instance where the vowel ◌ِ is short. Instances when ◌ِ is short simply need to be memorized.

2.5. Hidden Consonant Clusters (Doubled Letters)[28]

Some words in Classical Syriac contain *hidden consonant clusters*. This happens when a letter is doubled even though the doubling is not indicated in the script (i.e. the letter is only written once). Hidden consonant clusters can be identified in the following way: if a letter is immediately preceded by a short vowel and is immediately followed by a vowel sound, the letter has been doubled.[29] Note the following examples:

Table 2.7 – Hidden Consonant Clusters (i.e. Doubled Letters)		
Word	**Transliteration**	**Explanation**
ܡܛܠ	meṭṭūl	The letter ܛ is preceded by a short vowel and is also immediately followed by a vowel sound.
ܫܠܡ	šallem	The letter ܠ is preceded by a short vowel and is also immediately followed by a vowel sound.
ܡܠܟܐ	malkāʾ	The letter ܠ is not doubled because even though it is preceded by a short vowel, it is not immediately followed by a vowel sound.

The reason why this rule works is because in Classical Syriac, short vowels drop out of a word when the following letter is immediately followed by a vowel sound.[30] For example, if the ܛ in the word ܡܛܠ had not been doubled, the zlāmāʾ pšîqāʾ (ܼ) would have dropped out and the word would have become ܡܛܠ*. But the fact that the letter ܛ is preceded by a short vowel and is immediately followed by a vowel sound indicates that the ܛ has been doubled. Note that this rule does not apply to the following words: ܐܒܐ ("father"), ܐܠܗܐ ("God"), ܒܥܬܐ ("joy"), and ܡܠܐܟܐ ("angel").[31]

[28] Cf. Nöldeke §21; Muraoka §§6G; Duval §§112–116; Mingana §§16–17, 19–22, 31–34; Brockelmann §§25, 27–28.

[29] An important exception to this rule is in the Pᵉˢal perfect of verbs that begin with ܐ (see chapter 5). In the Pᵉˢal perfect, the first root letter is normally written without a vowel. However, when the verb begins with ܐ, a zlāmāʾ pšîqāʾ is added to help with pronunciation. When this happens, the following letter is not doubled since the zlāmāʾ pšîqāʾ is simply a helping vowel and the doubling of the second root letter is not part of the regular paradigm. The fact that the second root letter is not doubled can be seen quite clearly when the second root letter is a BeGaDKePhaT letter (e.g. ܐܬܐ, "he came," ܐܟܠ, "he ate").

[30] This rule helps to explain some of the forms of verbs in the Pᵉˢal perfect conjugation. See §4.3.

[31] Cf. Duval §118.

When the doubled letter is a BeGaDKePhaT letter, the BeGaDKePhaT letter takes the hard pronunciation (e.g. ܒܒܠ, qabbel). When the letter that comes immediately after the doubled letter is a BeGaDKePhaT letter, the BeGaDKePhaT takes the soft pronunciation (e.g. ܡܓܠܠ).[32]

2.6. Diphthongs[33]

The term *diphthong* refers to a sound that is made when two vowel sounds occur side-by-side with the first vowel sound gradually sliding into the second vowel sound. Diphthongs in English are often formed when vowels are combined with the letters *w* or *y*. Note the following examples:

Table 2.8 – Diphthongs in English	
Example	Explanation
boy	The *o* and the *y* combine to form a sound that starts off as an *o* but slides into an *e*.
now	The *o* and the *w* combine to form a sound that starts off as an *a* but slides into a *u*.
buy	The *u* and the *y* combine to form a sound that starts off as an *i* but slides into an *e*.
way	The *a* and the *y* combine to form a sound that starts off as an *ey* but slides into an *e*.

Diphthongs in Classical Syriac are formed in exactly the same way—diphthongs are formed by combining a vowel sound with the letters ܐ or ܝ.[34] Note the following examples:[35]

Table 2.9 – Diphthongs in Syriac			
Diphthong	**Pronunciation**	**Example**	**Pronunciation**
ܐ◌ܘ[36]	ow	ܡܘܬܐ	mow-tah
ܝ◌	uy	ܒܘܥܐ	buy-tah
ܝ◌	uy	ܒܘܫܐ	buy-shah

[32] According to Muraoka §6G, even though the ܠ in ܡܓܠܠ technically should be doubled (it comes from the root ܚܠܠ), it is no longer doubled in East Syriac. In other words, in East Syriac it should be transliterated mel̲ṯā' rather than mell$^{(e)}$ṯ̲ā'. Be that as it may, the ܐ is still pronounced with the soft pronunciation as indicated by the rûkkāk̲ā' (◌ܟ).

[33] Cf. Nöldeke §§4, 23, 40, 49; Muraoka §§4b, 6E, 68; Duval §§51–53, 60; Mingana §62; Brockelmann §§16, 22. Mingana and Muraoka do not consider these to be true diphthongs. Their approach, however, focuses too narrowly on the classification of the relevant letters as consonants rather than as consonants that under certain circumstances produce vowel sounds. Similar combinations of vowels and consonants (e.g. *ow*) are normally considered to be diphthongs in English.

[34] Diphthongs can also be made in East Syriac when ܒ has the soft pronunciation (w) and when ܟ is pronounced like a *w*. However, these pronunciations are not used in this textbook. See §1.4.

[35] The first three examples are the most common diphthongs and are the ones that should be concentrated on when learning how to pronounce diphthongs.

[36] Diphthongs that should be spelled ◌ܐ◌ܘ are always spelled ◌ܐ◌ܘ in East Syriac.

ܒܝ	ee-oo	ܓܠܒܘ	gal-lee-oo
ܗ̣ܝ	ey-oo	,ܢܒܝܥܐ	na-ḥey-oo

Note that these diphthongs form closed syllables. This means that the next syllable has no vowel sound that comes before it. This can be seen in the first and second examples given above. In both cases, the letter ܬ is pronounced with the hard pronunciation (t) rather than the soft pronunciation (ṯ) since it is not immediately preceded by a vowel sound.

The distinct sound made by diphthongs often disappears when the diphthong moves further away from the stressed syllable. When this happens, diphthongs are said to have collapsed and the vowel at the beginning of the diphthong is said to have contracted. When this happens, the ܐ̈ simply becomes ܐ̇ while the ,̣ and the ,̈ simply become ̣, or ,̣. In each of these cases, the ܐ and the , are said to have become quiescent (i.e. silent). Note that in these cases, the ܐ and the , are technically not vowel letters because they are part of the root of the word.

2.7. When are ܐ and , Pronounced as Consonants?[37]

Since ܐ and , can be used as vowel letters and are sometimes silent, it can be difficult at times to know when to pronounce them as consonants. Here are three quick rules to figure out when to pronounce ܐ and , as consonants:

(a) When ܐ or , are written with their own vowel (apart from ̣ or ̇) they should be pronounced as consonants: e.g. ܓܐܘܢܝܐ (gāwānāyāʾ).

(b) When ܐ or , do not have their own vowel and are preceded by ̈ or ̣, they form part of a diphthong and should, therefore, be pronounced as consonants. See the diphthong examples given above.

(c) When a , is preceded by a ḥb̲āṣāʾ, only one , is written and the , has both the dot from the ḥb̲āṣāʾ and the vowel that the , is supposed to be pronounced with: e.g. ܢܒܝ (*n[e]b̲îyāʾ*).

2.8. Stress[38]

In East Syriac, the stressed syllable is always the second-last syllable unless the word only has a single syllable. Note the following examples:[39]

[37] Cf. Nöldeke §40; Mingana §32; Brockelmann §4.
[38] Nöldeke §56; Muraoka §6O; Duval §§156–61; Mingana §87; Brockelmann §§29–37.
[39] The stressed syllable is indicated by an acute accent (e.g. é). Stress is not normally indicated in transliteration.

Table 2.10 – Stressed Syllables	
Syriac	**Transliteration With Accent**
ܐܲܠܳܗܵܐ	ʾalā́hāʾ
ܟܸܣܦ̈ܵܐ	káspāʾ
ܡܕܺܝܢ̱ܵܬ̱ܵܐ	mḏînā́ṯāʾ

2.9. Vocabulary

Proper Nouns	
ܝܪ̈ܘܫܠܶܡ	Jerusalem
ܕ̈ܘܝܕ	David
ܝܘ̈ܚܢܢ	John
ܝܘ̈ܣܦ	Joseph
ܝܥ̈ܩܘܒ	Jacob, James[40]
ܝܫܘ̈ܥ[41]	Jesus, Joshua
ܟܹ̈ܐܦܵܐ	Cephus, stone
ܡ̈ܘܫܶܐ	Moses
ܡ̈ܪܝܡ	Mary, Miriam
ܡ̈ܨܪ̈ܝܡ	Egypt

2.10. Homework

a) Memorize the vocabulary in 2.9 above. Make sure you can translate the words from Syriac to English as well as English to Syriac. The following link on Quizlet can be used to help you memorize the vocabulary: https://quizlet.com/_9nnqk7?x=1jqt&i=2z26w0.

b) Memorize the names of the vowels in East Syriac, their forms, how the forms are transliterated, and their pronunciations. Practice sheet 2.1 reproduces Table 2.1 above but only includes the names of the vowels. Practice filling out the rest of the chart.

c) Using practice sheet 2.2 at https://markfrancois.wordpress.com/syriac-grammar/, divide the Syriac words into syllables. When the words contain BeGaDKePhaT letters, indicate whether

[40] Note that the word "Jacob" is translated as James in English when referring to the two disciples named James and Jesus's brother. The fact that "Jacob" is translated as "James" has to do with internal developments in English as a language rather than differences in Syriac or Greek. In German, for example, the disciples named James and James the brother of Jesus are referred to as Jakobus, the same name used for Jacob in the Old Testament.

[41] For an explanation of why ܝܫܘ̈ܥ differs from the West Syriac pronunciation, see Nöldeke §§40, 48.

they should be pronounced with the hard pronunciation or the soft pronunciation using a qûššāyāʾ or a rûkkāk̲āʾ. Make sure you can explain why these letters have either a hard or soft pronunciation.

d) Using practice sheet 2.3 at https://markfrancois.wordpress.com/syriac-grammar/, transliterate the words in Syriac into English letters. Pay special attention to when the BeGaDKePhaT should have a hard pronunciation or a soft pronunciation. Make sure you can explain why these letters have either a hard or a soft pronunciation.

e) Using practice sheet 2.4 at https://markfrancois.wordpress.com/syriac-grammar/, copy the Syriac text, including the vowels, into the lines that are provided. Vowel points should be added after the consonants have been written out. Practice pronouncing each word.