

IN MEMORIAM

ABROHOM NURO (1923–2009)

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It was a sad day when we learned of the passing away of Malphono Abrohom Nuro at the age of eighty-six. Nuro was a symbol of activism for a language and a heritage he so proudly cherished. Western scholars got to know him as he was a regular attendee of the Symposium Syriacum. In the East he worked most of his life for the advancement of the Syriac language. The numerous neologisms he devised are now standard in Kthobonoyo. He knew the lexica almost by heart. One day when he was visiting us in NJ and heard me use my own neologism *مختا, فاكوا* ‘water of fruits’ for *juice* with my daughter Tabetha, he quickly pointed out that Classical Syriac *ܡܘܬܐ* already existed in P. Smith and Margoliouth. When someone would challenge him about his usage of some lexeme or another, he would quickly defend the term: *ܡܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ* ‘it is from the Fathers, not one of mine’. His usage of *ܡܘܬܐ* to denote a Classical Syriac lexeme as opposed to a neologism he devised himself is a neologism in itself.

He was born Ibrahim Kahlaji in 1923 in Edessa, then migrated to Aleppo with the massive Edessan exodus of 1924. He was probably the first to Syriacize his name using Abrohom Nuro (though the original name remains in his official documents). In 1946 he joined the University of St. Joseph, Lebanon, and studied law, only to withdraw in the final year due to illness. From the 1950s he began to work in the field of Syriac, especially teaching the language, and was the first to introduce Kthobonoyo Syriac as the spoken language at home (first with his sisters, and much later

in life with his wife). He lived in Beirut from 1964 until 1982 where he taught Syriac at Taw Mim Simkath School, 1970–1971 (and earlier 1948–1946), Kaslik (1967–1968). Since 1943 he organized more than 45 Syriac-language evening courses in Aleppo, Beirut, Qamishli, and Mor Gabriel Monastery. He developed an audio-visual pedagogical method called *suloqo*, later published in book form. His reform proposals include printing Syriac in separate letters (*al-Istrangilyyya al-Mustaqilla* with Karim Shahan, Beirut, 1967), a partial vocalization system for schools (see *Suloko*, Holland, 1989), and hundreds of neologisms for modern technical terms, many of which are now standard in Kthobonoyo Syriac (see *Tawldotbo*, 1997, and the appendix to Manna's dictionary, 2nd ed., Beirut, 1975). In 1967, he published *My Tour*, a report on the state of the Syr. Orth. Church, but also rich with pictures of Syriac scholars from Joseph Assemani (1687–1768) to Nöldeke (1826–1920). His private library is rich with books published in the Middle East during the 1800s and 1900s, most of which were acquired in photocopy form by G. Kiraz. His unpublished works include a checklist of the Syriac books in his collection, and various studies in draft form.

Abrohom Nuro will be missed by many.