PART FOUR

CLAUSE STRUCTURE
CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON CLAUSE STRUCTURE

16.1 NOMINAL AND VERBAL CLAUSES

A clause is a construction in which predication occurs. Traditionally the construction of two or more clauses that are coordinated in one grammatical unit is called a compound sentence. A sentence made up of a main clause and one or more dependent clauses is called a complex sentence.¹ In the study of clause structure in Classical Syriac these distinctions are highly important, since some of the most common types of clauses (the tripartite nominal clauses and the so-called cleft sentences) are interpreted by some as simple clauses and by others as complex sentences.²

We can distinguish between verbal clauses, in which the predication is expressed by means of a finite verb, and nominal or non-verbal clauses, in which the predicate is a non-verbal element. In Syriac, the predicate of a non-verbal clause may be an adjectival phrase, an indefinite substantive phrase, a definite substantive phrase, a pronoun, an adverb or a prepositional phrase.³

Clauses containing a participle are included in our description of nominal clause patterns, but we shall see that the syntactic behaviour of participles differs from that of other predicative elements due to their verbal character. Since predicative adjectives show the same syntactic behaviour as participles, it is preferable to examine the participles and adjectives together in the category of ‘participials’.⁴

¹ Thus e.g. Waltke–O’Connor, Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 690; see, however, § 8.8 for the problems involved in applying the notion of ‘sentence’ to Classical Syriac and § 26.2 for the refinement of the definition of dependency.
² See §§ 18.1, 24.1–2.
³ Joosten, Syriac Language, 78. Neither Nöldeke nor Goldenberg distinguishes between definite and indefinite substantive phrases; ibid., 86. When the predicate is an adverb or a prepositional phrase, Joosten speaks of an adverbial clause, rather than a nominal clause (ibid., 77).
⁴ Cf. Goldenberg, ‘Syriac Sentence Structure’, 115–117; see also Chapter 20.