

Introduction

Many of our parishioners ask this question, were there pictures in our church? How do you worship pictures? In the beginning, we have to distinguish between worship and honor. We do not worship the Icons; we do show honor (veneration and respect) to whom the icons' image represent. We worship God alone and may not have any other before Him.

Unfortunately, most of our people of the Assyrian Church of the East are ignorant of their own church history. The Church of the East utilized icons throughout its early history. With the rise of the Islam, this religion forbade any type of representations of Saints because the Church of the East was located within the Islamic territories and within the Islamic empires; they were forced to remove their icons.

It is well known among the believers that the veneration of images, as it exists amongst the catholic and Orthodox churches. Many people ask the question about the existence of images in the Church of the East, or not. And why there are no pictures in the current time, even though our church is ancient one and considered to be one of the ancient Apostolic Churches and is there any evidence from liturgical texts, patristic writings of the East Syrian tradition to prove its existence?

One of the most general misunderstands about the Assyrian Church of the East is that it does not use icons or is even reluctant to icons. For many Assyrians this would seem natural and correct as they have not seen icons in their worship and may have been told that the Church of the East rejects icons, though all other ancient Christian traditions have icons and it may be shocking to think of an apostolic church without icons.

It is fair to say that the cult of the image was never as strong in the Syrian churches as it was in the Byzantine church. However, that does not mean East-Syrian Christians were iconoclasts, as has sometimes been suggested. It is worth to be mentioned that the sources of any Apostolic Church are bible and Tradition. Therefore, through this report, I'll provide several proves of concerning using the icons which have been written by among ecclesiastical fathers in east-Syrian liturgy and tradition, Also in holy Bible especially in Old Testament.

Icons in the Old Testament

We have evidences in the Bible especially in Torah which emphasizes that the people of God had used the icons. For example in Exodus chapter (20.4), The second commandment of Decalogue the Lord said: *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."*

The spirit of the second commandment of the Decalogue is not to offer worship to anyone or anything other than God. The worship of God is in the Spirit and the truth, and God does not allow us to establish His image and worship Him. The worship is God, which is heavenly and unmatched on the earth, and therefore cannot be likened to. But this does not prevent the Church from putting pictures of the saints to follow them and to serve as an example to honor them.

Furthermore, God himself has asked to put two Cherub statues above the Ark of the Covenant and pictures of the Cherubim in the Tent of Meeting and that means the icons in the church have an educational role. This is clearly shown by God's command to His people in ancient times by establishing certain images that He identified, not as an adornment adorned in the house of the Lord, but as a living part of the worshiping climate. Exodus 25:40).

as well the images of the cherubim statues on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant ... Moses and all the people were worshiped in front of the ark, and the Lord spoke with them Among the cherubim (Numbers 10: 35-36, Ex 25: 22)¹. Cherub was depicted on the veil of the tent of meeting between the Holy of Holies and Jerusalem. The image of the Carp became a recurring artistic unit engraved on the walls of the Temple and on the doorstep (1 Kings 6: 27-29, 32; 2: 3: 7)².

The commandment aims to stop the infiltration of pagan worship to the people and not to prevent the use of images in them. The Jewish people were known to fall into two kinds of paganism:

a. Complying with the paganisms surrounding them, King Solomon also fell into the cult of alien gods when he married puthanias. Therefore there was the confusion between pagan worship and the worship of the living God.

b. God commanded Moses to "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, (pyrotechnic) placed on a pillar in the wilderness to be the secret of healing for all who see it (Num 21: 8-9)³.

So God did not prevent icons and statues except in terms of fear of them falling into the pagan deviations. But when this fear is lost, the icons become an educational role as a universal language that every human being understands, and a spiritual role.

The worship of the image is something and uses it to recall its subject is something else. Therefore the drawings are used in the churches so that at least the illiterates can read as they look to the walls, which they cannot read in the books.

¹ The holy Bible, Peshitta, George M. Lamsa, P.94, 167.

² The Bible, P. 382.

³ The Bible, P. 179.

Inaccurate Viewpoints regarding the non existence of Images in the church of the east

The existence for the use of icons is plentiful, continues well into the 14th century. Although the Assyrian Church does not currently make large use of icons, but they are indeed present in her tradition. Our Church had survived as a minority group and it was natural to conclude that the Islamic culture had affected their attitude towards images during the Islamic rulers.

There is much to be said that especially from a Protestant point of view which considers as incorrect, as it made the Church of the East appear to be free of image veneration. Even when images were seen in our churches Protestant missionaries viewed them as an innovation due to the influence of Rome.⁴

From the first glance, it does seem that may be true when we said that veneration of icons is against the doctrine of the church of the east. During the 19th century Protestant missionaries who visited the East-Syrian Christians in the Middle East do seem to have reported that the churches they saw did not use icons or images. According to Southgate's⁵ Grant's⁶ and Badger's⁷ observations regarding the absence of icons and images were undoubtedly correct for the 19th century modest churches in the Hakkari mountains of Eastern Turkey or the region around Urmia, the lands where they exerted most of their missionary activities, and may be more of our people will agree with them.

Moreover, According to Grant, the Assyrians were the linear descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. To his great satisfaction, he notes the total absence of icons in their churches, which he considered another proof of their Jewish origins and traditions.⁸

But after 50 years after Grants death, the unite Chaldean Patriarch Abdisho I Khayyath(1895-1898) wrote a long pastoral letter, in which he defended the veneration of the holy Cross and of images of Christ and the saints. His letter is addressed against the Protestants and intend to convince the Chaldean Christians that the veneration of icons was no Chaldean innovation and did not mean idolatry as the Protestant missionaries thought, but was based on the age old, venerable tradition of the church of the east (the mother church of the Chaldeans).⁹

⁴ . O.H. Parry, The ancient Syrian church in Mesopotamia, London: Syrian Patriarchate Education Society, 1892, 34.

⁵ Horatio Southgate, Narrative of a visit to the Syrian church of Mesopotamia with statement and reflections upon the Present of Christianity in Turkey, New York, 1856, p.54.

⁶ Asahel Grant, the Nestorians, or the lost Tribes, Amsterdam, 1973. On Grant, see P.Kawerau, Amerika und die orientalischen Kirchen. Ursprung und Umfang der amerikanischen Mission unter den Nationalkirchen Westasiens, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 31, Berlin, 1958. Pp.233-254.

⁷ George Percy Badger, the Nestorians and their Rituals with the Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, vol 2, London, 1852.

⁸ Asahel Grant, Die Nestorianer oder Die zehn Stämme, Freiburg, 2006. P.62

⁹ E. Delly, Le culte des saints images dans l'Eglise syrienne orientale, Orient Syrien 1, 1956, p. 291-296.

The objective of this article is to give an inventory of the east-Syrian theological and historical texts, written in the Middle East, the heartland of East-Syrian Christianity, which in different ways, testify to the veneration of icons till the 14th century by members of the church of the east.

The theological thought of patristic

1. The acts of Mar Mari

First, we will begin with the oldest testimony to prove that images exist in the Acts of Mari, we find the account of the correspondence between King Abgar the Black and Christ. Abgar, according to *the Acts of Mar Mari the Apostle*, is the king of Edessa during the time of Christ. He hears of this Judean King and sends emissaries to receive his message and depict his appearance. Notice the way icons are introduced:

*The letter came to Abgar the king, and he received it with great joy. When they related to him the wonders that were performed by Jesus in the land of Judea, he admired and was amazed by the might of God. Since he was not worthy of seeing these things...he found skilled painters and ordered them...to depict the fact of our Lord and bring the depiction...to him. The painters were not able to depict the Lord's human appearance. When our Lord realized, thought the understanding of His divinity, the love of Abgar for Him and as He saw the painters who endeavored to find the image to depict Him as He was, but failed, He took a cloth and imprinted on it His face...The cloth was placed in the Church of Edessa, where it still remains as a source of all kinds of help.*¹⁰

The east-Syrian acts of Mari is a legendary account of the first Christianization of Mesopotamia, more specifically of the region around the capital of the Persian empire, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, or in modern terms, central Iraq. A number of observations by the anonymous author may be valid for later period, sometimes as late as the period, when the acts were put into writing. For the present study, there are two fragments:

- a. The first fragment is Eusebius of Caesarea (265 – 339), who confirms in his book that he had seen the statue of Christ, when he stayed in Caesarea Philippi.¹¹
- b. The second fragment is the story of the Mandylion as one of the early east-syriac witnesses, which will be used to legitimize the veneration of images in our churches. According to Christian tradition, the Image of Edessa was a holy relic consisting of a square or rectangle of cloth upon which a miraculous image of the face of Jesus had been imprinted, the first icon ("image") which is generally known as the Mandylion).¹²

¹⁰ A. Harrak, "The Acts of Mar Mari the Apostle", Writings from the Greco-Roman World II, Atlanta, 2005, found in *Die Welt der Gotterbilder*, ed. B Groneberd & H Spieckermann, p. 327

¹¹ G. Bardy, Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*, Paris 1955, pp. 191/192.

¹² Harrak, the acts of Mar Mari, p.4-5.

2. The abbreviated Ecclesiastical chronicle. مختصر الاخبار البيعة

So-called *مختصر الاخبار البيعة* is an anonymous history of the church of the east, written in Arabic, and can be dated to the 11th century. According to the editor, this chronicle would contain the missing original part of the famous chronicle of Sirt:

ولما عاد مرماري الى المدائن وعمد سائر الناس انحدر الى دستميسان ففعل مثل ذلك وبلغت دعوته الى نحو فارس فلما عاد منصرفا نظر الى المومنين بالمسيح لا يعرفون السنن وازمان الاعياد فدون لهم ذلك ورتب وقاتها ودفعه اليهم وصور لهم شخص السيدة الطاهرة مارتريم وسيدنا المسيح على لوح واطلق لهم ان يجعل مثل ذلك في جميع البيع على خشب وفضه وذهب وشبه وغير ذلك ليحيى قلوب المومنين بمشاهدة ذلك وقاس هذا القديس في ذلك بما فعله سيدنا لما سمح وجهه في منديل فانتطع صورته وانفذه الى ابجر الملك الاسود.¹³

This portion not only indicates to the story of king Abgar and the Mandylion, but also ascribe to Mari himself that he painted a picture representing Jesus and Mary. Therefore, the Church of the East, beyond other traditions, from the perspective of the theology of the incarnation, the tradition of the icon fixes as a direct inheritance from Our Lord himself, since before iconoclasm, recognizes the Christological impact that icons have, when God the Son was incarnate and therefore we can depict the Son of God in his humanity.

3. Book of Majdal, كتاب المجدل

AL-MAJDAL meaning “The Tower” which is a village in Israel located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. This valuable book written in Arabic about the East Syriac theology relates to Mar Mari who went to Maysan and his mission extended as far as the land of Persia. In the churches he describes the image of the lady and of righteous persons, after the person of the Lord, so that the hearts of the people might be enlightened imitating the Lord in his sending to Abgar the mandylion, which bore his image.¹⁴

4. Barkhadbshabba Arabaya. ጸሐፊው ጸሐፊው

He is priest and chief of the scholars of the Academy of Nisibis. He noted in his history of the holy fathers persecuted for the truth, composed by Mar Abraham bet Rabban in the end of the 6th century:

¹³. B. Haddad, *Muhtasar al-Ahbar al-biyyah*, Baghdad, 2000.

¹⁴ أخبار بطارقة كرسى المشرق - مارى بن سليمان. Rome, 1899, p. 4.

Possessed an icon of the lord ܡܝܬܪܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ and the sign of the cross. And when he stood up for lighting the candle (in order to begin saying the office), he performed first five ܡܕܡܝܬ before the icon and then he also greeted the cross.¹⁵ That means a clear evidence of the image of the Lord in the sixth century.

5. Sahdona. ܣܗܕܢܐ

Sahdona was metropolitan of bet Garmay in 7th Century who was condemned by his Patriarch Ishoyahb III (650-658) and exiled to holy place Edessa for his Christological views. We have a short reference of his earlier witness of the veneration of the Mandyllion in Edessa which is found in the Syriac corpus of letters, written by Catholicos Ishoyahb III who was opponent of Sahdona.¹⁶

It should be noticed that in this fragment the icon of Christ was put next to a cross, which therefore most probably did not have a corpus or any other pictorial representation. Also Patriarch Khayyat found a passing reference to image of saints in the work of Barkhadbshabba s illustrious Mar Narsai.¹⁷

6. Gabriel Qatraya. ܓܒܪܝܐܠ ܩܬܪܝܐ

One of the giants in the interpretation of East-Syrian Liturgy is Gabriel bar Lipeh from Qatar is the Author of liturgical commentary, which was written in the early 7th century, his commentary divided into five ܡܕܡܝܬ. The last one of Memre deals with the Eucharist and contains the following passage:

The cross and the gospel that are placed on the altar and above them the icon of our lord, amidst which the awesome Mysteries are consecrated: these fulfill the place of the person of our lord. Accordingly, it is not permitted for the holy Mysteries to be concentrated without the proximity of the Cross, the gospel and the icon of our Lord.¹⁸

The text speaks for itself, although it is not so easy to determine exactly what is meant with the icon of our lord ܡܝܬܪܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ put or hanging above the gospel and the Cross lying on the altar. In any rate, the presence of the icon together with the Cross and the Gospel was a necessary condition for valid celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy. As well in subsequent period we can be inferred that this passage is summarized by Abraham bar Lipeh in the beginning of 8th century.¹⁹

¹⁵ François Nau, Barkhadbeshabba Arbaia. Histoire ecclesiastique (II partie), Patrologia Orientalis IX.5, Turnhout, 1971, p.624.

¹⁶ M. Fiey, Isoyaw le Grand, OCP 35-2, pp. 305-333,361.

¹⁷ Delly, Le culte, p. 294-295.

¹⁸ Sebastian. Brock, Gabriel of Qatar commentary on the liturgy, section 45 Hugoye 6, 2, 2003.

¹⁹ Richard Hugh Connolly, Anonymi auctoris exposition officiorum Ecclesiae, Goergio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta; accredit abraham bar Lipeh interpretation officiorum, CSCO 72, Paris-Leipzig, 1913, p. 175.

7. Abraham of bet Hale

He was a monk of the Monastery of Bar Hale, where was situated in southern Iran near Kufa and Hira. This report written in Syriac in the first quarter of the 8th century, although the conversation itself was in Arabic language in the Question and Answer genre: the Muslim Asks the questions and the Monk deliver elaborate answers. One of the Arguments advanced by the Muslims in order to prove the superiority of their religion was (we do not worship the cross, neither the bones of martyrs, nor images like you do). Then Monk confirmed this practices and explaining that in the following passage clearly refers to the mandylion that Christ imprinted a cloth with his face legitimizes the veneration of icons and defending them with the following words:

20. **سندھ** لکھ سوئے ۽ مسندیں لکھس ڊکھڻ ۾ ڪم ڪندو.

ونسجد لصورته ونكرمها لانها طبع بوجه وسلمت لنا وكلما راينا يقوته نرى ونقدم التبجيل لصورة الملك لان الملك

Meaning: *and we worship his image and venerate it because it imprinted His face and was delivered to us, every time we see his icon, we see him so we glorify the image of the king because He is the King.*

Afterward, the Muslim Amir answered:

I know that it is the icon ~~icon~~ that he impressed with his face and sent it to King Abgar of Edessa. And it is appropriate for all believers in Christ to honor his image as himself. That means the veneration of icons was already an important issue in East Syrian and Muslim discussions at a relatively early stage.²¹

8. Isho Bar Nun

In unedited series of 23 liturgical questions addressed to catholicos Isho bar nun(823-827), S. Brock discovered a question number 10 about a priest , who in an emergency has to baptize his own child, whereas no one else- expect the mother – is present to receive the child, to act as godparent. Isho Bar Nun solution is that the child has to put on an icon of Christ ܝܫܘܥ ܒܢ ܡܪܝܡ, if it is a boy, and on an icon of Mary in the case of a girl. Thus the icon takes the place of the godparent. In question 21, there is still a passing reference to icons of saints.²²

²⁰ Sidney H. Griffith, *Syriac Writes on Muslims and the religious challenge of islam in Moran Etho 7*, Kottayam, 1995, pp. 29-32.

²¹ G. Reinink, the veneration of icons, the Cross and the bones of the Martyrs in an early east syriac Apology against Islam, p 29-32 and H. Drijvers, the Images of Edassa in the Syriac Tradition, pp.27-28.

²² S. Brock, a.c. (Hugoye gives no page numbers).

There are many texts of Khudra proving existence of veneration of Images. But we mention one of the liturgical texts, they also indicate the existence of the icon of Christ, again together with Cross and Gospel:

يا مخلصنا كنيسةك تحمل كنزا و ثروة سماوية في الاسرار والرموز التي سلمتها لها. بها الملجا والامل . كتاب العظيم لا يشارتك و صليبك من الخشب الموقر و ايقونه الرائعة لانسانيتك ❖ نمجد اسرار خلاصه.

So we find out in this text that we venerate the humanity of Christ in Icon. This attitude is supported the bible which confirmed that shall not make for God (divine of Christ) a carved image. (Theology of Antioch emphasize on roll of humanity of Christ in redemption).

The Rite of Consecrating an Altar with Oil contains instructions of what the Church of the East altar is to have. After sanctifying the Twelyata-ܬܠܝܬܐ, also called Dape-ܕܦܝܬܐ, being a board of fruit-wood (which is used much as an antimension is in the Byzantine Churches), the elements necessary for a liturgy are set upon the altar. This service is generally ascribed to Catholicos Ishoyahb III of Adiabene (649-649). Here are the instructions that describe that, which follow the anointing of the altar and the tbelayta, in the section of the rite for the consecration of the altar with oil the following rubric:

²³Thoma. Darmo, Khudra, Part III, Trichur, 1962, p. 563, 581.

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11. Hunayn ben Ishaq. حنين بن اسحاق

In the *Chronicon ecclesiasticum* of Gregory Barhebraeus (13th Century) there is passage which describes the resistant standpoint of the famous physician and translator Hunayn Ben Ishaq(808-873) towards the veneration of icons.²⁵

12. Patriarch Theodosius

Patriarch Theodosius I (853-858) articulates about the East Syriac attitude towards icons, when he explains to al-Mutawakkil that, when an educated person spits on an icon, he deserves to be punished since "he does not spit on the image but on Christ and Mary". Apparently he had believed that icons are instruments of the "real presence" of Christ or the Saints, which therefore are worthy of respect and veneration.

In the oldest and most authentic one of Christian and Muslim sources, recorded by Ibn Abi Ushaybia (1269), one find that Catholicos Theodosius was recalled to the court by Caliph al-Mutawakkil who wished to know more about Christian views on the veneration of icons.

The reason for this invitation was that this personal physician Hunayn had spitted on an icon representing Mary and Christ. According to this story, Hunayn had been lured into a trap set up by one of his competitor physicians who had condemned him to Caliph for iconoclastic behavior. At the same time, he told Hunayn that when the Caliph would ask him about his opinion on icons, he should answer those they were just images which you should not venerate and on which you could spit without any problem.

Patriarch articulates the East-Syrian situation towards icons, when he explains to al-Mutawakkil that, when an educated person spits on the images, he deserves to be punished, because he did not spit on the image, but on Christ and Mary. Apparently, he believes that icons are instruments of a real presence of Christ or the Saints.

The end of the story Hunain was put into jail and that his fortune was confiscated. After six months, the Caliph who had become ill regretted his decision and restored him to his previous position.²⁶ Also there are other references concerning of icons by Hunayn who mentions that Christians decorate their churches with paintings in order to attract the attention of visitors.

²⁵ G. Strohmaier. Hunain ibn Ishaq und die Bilder' Klio, Hildesheim, 1965, p. 43-45.

²⁶ Jean Baptiste. Abbeloos and Thomas. Lamy, Gregorii Bar Hebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum, III. Louvain, 1877, col. 197-199.

13. Hasan Ban Bahlul. حسن ابن بهلول

The famous Syriac-Arabic Dictionary composed by the east-Syrian grammarian and lexicographer Hasan ban Bahlul in the 10th century. We find under word **فندح** (an idol shrine, Temple) the following additions in Arabic: a dome, and also the image of an idol or as we represent the image صورة of St. Mary and other images.²⁷ This paragraph confirms that is the existence of images.

14. Catholicos Elias II

The Patriarch Elias II bar Maqli (1111-1131) is the author of an important theological treatise, written in Arabic and preserved under the name (Origins of Religion) **كتاب اصول الدين**. Chapter fifteen is a treatise on the cross and the finding of the Wood on which Christ our Redeemer was crucified, but also contains a number of remarks concerning the veneration of icons, which we find in following passage:

(The images in the churches take the place of writing. The form of writing of each language is different from another language. We depict images in the churches, which takes the place of writing for those who cannot write nor read, such as youngsters or illiterate people. If one sees and contemplates the image, one no longer needs to ask questions about it, such as a person who does not know to read, asks someone else to read for him. In this respect, images of this matter are better than anything. That we venerate, kiss and honor them comes in the place of the honor, paid by our friends, the Muslims, to the copies of their Holy Scripture.)²⁸

In this paragraph Catholicos Elia II confirms that the images in the churches functioned as a kind of *biblia pauperum* or Bible of the poor (**الكتاب المقدس للفقراء**); furthermore, at that time, Muslims took offence at the practice of the veneration of icons, therefore he had explained to them in understandable terms, sc. By indicating to the way in which Muslims venerated copies of the Quran. He emphasizes more than other East-Syrian authors that the images of Saints convey a real presence: kissing the icon is tantamount of conversing with the represented persons.

²⁷ R. Duval, *Lexicon syriacum auctore Hassano Bar Bahlule II*, paris, 1901, p.1626.

²⁸ G. Giannazza, *Elie II. Kitab usul al-Din*, vol 2, pp. 311-314.

15. Catholicos Mar Denkha I (1265-1281). ܡܪ ܕܢܚܝܐ ܐܬܝܠܐܝܐ

We also have another reference which is written by a certain monk John in panegyric on Patriarch Catholicos Mar Denkha I, who was the metropolitan of Arbila when church was built:

Patriarch built a church in the citadel of Arbil, which was very beautiful. For this church, he spent an immeasurable amount of gold and silver and decorated it with beautiful things and images ܐܝܬܝܠܐܝܐ, which exceeded his forces. He depicted in it the entire economy of our Lord Jesus.²⁹

Also, Mar Denkha I indicated that the images in the churches clearly functioned as *biblia pauperum* for youngsters or illiterate people, we find same view by Catholicos Mar Elias II.

On reading further, for the East Syrians, images and icons functioned as *biblia pauperum* (Bible for the poor) which considers the poor man's book for youngsters and illiterate peoples to understand the Scriptures. The *Biblia pauperum* was a tradition of biblical picture Books.

16. Catholicos Yahbalaha. ܡܪ ܝܗܒܠܐܝܗܐ

His origin from Mongol, after his ordination to Metropolitan, he had dream, in which he saw himself entering a church, with images of saints and a cross, apparently the normal situation of the church of the east in his time:

*One night, when he was sleeping, Mar Yahbalaha had a dream, as if he entered a big church. And in his church, there were images ܐܝܬܝܠܐܝܐ of saints and among them a cross.*³⁰

17. Ishoyahb bar Malkon 13th Century. ܡܪ ܝܫܝܝܗܒ ܒܪ ܡܠܟܢ

Here we find in Ishoyahbs fragment the classical references to Mar Mari and King Abgar. Also, he quotes Ex.25:18, where God himself orders Moses to make images or the emphasis on the fact that the veneration is according to intention and does not go to the material.

He served as bishop in the city Mardin, under the name of Joseph, in the first quarter of the 13th century and then he was later transferred to the metropolitan of Nisibin, where he adopted the name of Isho'yahb. He has many of brief theological treatises, which was written in Arabic, among which a Refutation of the Jews and the Muslims who are against the Christians worshipping idols, since they venerate the Cross and honor the Images of Christ, Our Lady and the Saints. He said in his treatise:

²⁹ Paul. Bedjan, "Memra de Mar Dcnha, Qatoliqa Patriarkis d-Madnha", in *Histoire de Mar .labalaha, de trois autres patriarches, d'un pretre et de deux lai'ques nestoriens* (Paris, Leipzig, 1985), p. 332—346.

³⁰ Paul, Bedjan, *Historie de Mar Jab-alaha, patriarche et de Raban Sauma*, Paris-Leipzig, 1895, p. 29-30.

... The first to put the image of Christ and the Lady and the just of the Law (شريعة) in the church was the Apostle, Mar Mari was following what Christ our Lord had done, when He sent the (Mandylion) with his image to Abgar, the Lord of Edessa. And the images in the churches take the place of writing for person who does not know to write or read such as the common, illiterate people. When they see the icons, they no longer need to ask questions to experts and getting answers from them. And God said to the prophet Moses: "put the image of two angels on the Ark and the slab of examination on it and put their two faces facing each other and their two wings spread" (Ex. 25: 18 and 20). And if God ordered to make images in the old dispensation (سنة), how more appropriate is it that representations be made in the new, venerable dispensation. Therefore, we honor the representations of the servant of God, who sacrificed himself to God in obedience to God. Whenever we honor servants of God for God himself, as a means to God, (know that) this is the most venerable way of honoring God, in the same way as we honor a servant of a King on account of the King. We cannot by ourselves force our way to the King, for this would mean boldness towards him.)³¹

18. Hayat Channal قنات الحياة المسيحية

It was mentioned in one of the Sunni books in one of the missionary program (سؤال الجري - Bold Question) by Mr. Rasheed that in the city of Najaf there was a seller of pictures and statues of Christ and his mother Mary, but one of the successors of Muslims ordered the closing of the shops and breaking the statues because they are rejected in Islamic law. That means Christian had used Icons in the city of Najaf where our church was active.³²

19. Saliba Ibn Youkhana. صليبا ابن يوحنا

He was a priest, living in Cyprus in the 14th century, author of several theological treatises and responsible for the redaction of the theological collection, the books of secrets (اسفار الاسرار). The اسفار الاسرار is characterized by the passage of many important historical documents not mentioned in Majdal. It begins with an interesting treatise, called Letter of Proof and Guidance towards Love (رسالة البرهان و الارشاد الى المحبة), in which the author tries to explain that the Church of the East deserves better than the traditional condemnations of heresy pronounced by the Church of Rome, which in this period, in the aftermath of the Crusaders, was very much present on Cyprus. In this letter, there is reference to the veneration of the icons:

³¹ Paul Sbath, vingt traits philosophiques et apologetiques d auteurs arabes chretiens du IXe au XIVe siècle, Le Caire, 1929, pp.158.165.

³² See website Hayattv.tv, In the Videos field of the program سؤال الجري.

*"Among them (the adversaries of the Church of the East) who tell that we despise our Lady, the pure Virgin, and even that we deny her and make no commemoration of her in our prayer and that we do not put her icon (يقونتها) in our church."*³³

In the third Book of the secrets (اسفار الاسرار), Saliba comes back to this issue. Here, he explains the meaning of the veneration of icons in greater detail:

And since some people live in distant places and cannot come to their graves or to the places where their bodies (are preserved) on account of uninhabited mountains and wild they depict their images and write under each image the miracles which are known to have been performed by the person (depicted on the icon).

It was rather the Lord Christ who has authorized and prescribed it, when King Abgar of Edessa dispatched someone to ask Jesus to come to him in order to be blessed by His appearance and to be cured by Him from the illness that had befallen him.

But (Jesus) wrote to him that it was impossible for Him to come, but He informed him that He would send one of His disciples, who would cure him from his illness; and He took a mandylion and rubbed His face against it and His image was engraved on it in conformity with His appearance and likeness and He sent it to him, so that through it he would achieve his intention by contemplating Him. And in the course of time miracles and signs manifested themselves through this image, which have been transmitted trustworthy reporters in all languages.

*In the same way, the woman who for many years had a flow of blood and had spent all her money on physicians who, however, failed to cure her. And from the crowd she touched the fringe of the garment of our Lord Christ and she was healed (cf. Mk 5:25-29). She made two copper statues, one after her own image and one after the image of our Lord Christ. She belonged to the people of the city of Ban· to wealthy and noble family and she put the two statues at the outside of the city.*³⁴

Apart from the mentioning of the mandylion and the statue of Christ in Caesarea Philippi, Saliba text testifies to the widespread use of the veneration of images in the East Syrian churches of his time, they function on the one hand as (biblia pauperum) for the illiterate people, but, on the other, bring people through the commemoration of the saints in times of need to performing good deeds, agreeable to God.

³³ Gianmaria Gianazzan, *Traite de la demonstration et de la direction, Kitab al burhan wal irshad de Saliba ibn Zakhana*, *Parole d L Orient* 22, 1997, pp. 567-629.

³⁴ *Assemani, Bibliotheca orientalis III.2, p.353.*

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Also he is an author of a treatise on the veneration of icons, written in Arabic. His article belongs to the theological compendium كتاب اصول الدين. This work is preserved in only one manuscript, Beyrouth 1936, but, most unfortunately this chapter is lost.

21. Evidences in Chine.

Later scholars discovered the new evidence showed that East Syrian Christians had in fact made use of images in the course of their history, particularly when they established themselves in the remote areas of Central Asia and China.³⁵

Generally, Syrian Christians did tend to flavor an iconography that was more often symbolic and decorative than figural (*Drawing of a Horseman. Wall Painting from the Christian Church at Qoco*). But in fact the evidence indicates that their choice of a more symbolic style was in use well before the rise of Islam in the seventh century.

There are several references to such images which included Writing in 1248 from Samarkand an Armenian official records visiting a local church and seeing an image of Christ and the Magi.³⁶ In addition, Western European travelers to the Mongol court make similar observations on the presence of images in East syriac Churches.³⁷

John of Cora, Latin bishop of Sultaniyya in Persia, writing about 1330 of the East Syrians in Khan-baliq (Beijing) says that they had 'very beautiful and orderly churches with crosses and images in honor of God and of the saints'.³⁸ Also there is the inscription which refers to an imperial edict issued in 638 which reads: 'Bishop Alopen of the Kingdom of Ta-Ch'in, bringing with him the sutras and images, has come from afar and presented them at our capital'.³⁹

If the date of 635 for the arrival of Alopen is to be trusted then it is an early witness to the use of images in the Church of the East. The date endorses the seventh-century testimony of Abraham bar Lipeh, who writes in his Exposition of the liturgy that it is forbidden to consecrate the mysteries without the presence of the image of Christ in the Sanctuary. For him the image of Christ is a liturgical imperative, together with the cross and the gospel book.⁴⁰

³⁵ For East Syrian discoveries see, for example, A. von le Coq, *Buried treasures of Chinese Turkestan*, London, 1928; A. Stein, *On ancient Central-Asian tracks*, London: Macmillan, p. 193.

³⁶ *Chronicle of the Constable Smpad*: see W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol invasion*, fourth edition, London, 1977, p. 485.

³⁷ Mingana, 'The early spread of Christianity', 316.

³⁸ *Book of the estate of the Great Kaan*: see A.C. Moule, *Christians in China before the year 1550* (London: SPCK, 1930), 251.

³⁹ Saeki, *Nestorian monument*, p. 166.

⁴⁰ *Anonymi auctoris expositio officiorum Ecclesiae, Georgia Arbelensi vulgo adscripta*, II. *Accedit Abrahæ bar Upheh interpretatio officiorum*, ed. R.H. Connolly (CSCO 76 (Syr. 32), 1915), 161. For references to images of

22. Nestorian Church in Cyprus.

The church was built in the mid-14th. The identification of this building as such is based exclusively on medieval sources, which testify to the extraordinary wealth of the Nestorian merchant community of Famagusta⁴¹. Syrian inscriptions associated with the church's remaining wall paintings.⁴²

23. Liturgical-Biblical Manuscripts

There are ample evidences of the existence of Images in the Liturgical-biblical manuscripts (Handwritings) especially in book of *ܡܨܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܨܚܝܬܐ* and also other liturgical books.⁴³

Conclusion

From the liturgical perspective the Church of the East not only venerates icons but equates them with the Holy Cross and the Holy Gospel. This places the icon purposefully with the most adored objects of the Assyrian Church and not as a mere minor to worship. So why icons disappear from common use? I personally suspect the rise of Islam, which is intensely iconoclastic, as a cause of the current lack of icons.

The east-Syrian Liturgy and patristic commentaries express the Christological viewpoints in three things on the altar namely are: The Gospel is the holy word of God. The cross is the dwelling-place of God's glory in a mystical way due to it being the sign of our salvation. The icon of Christ is the proof of His human nature by which we see the divine person (Mystery of the Incarnation). Icons are found in every apostolic tradition, East and West, so they are not just a local practice but a part of the "Tradition of the Church Catholic and Universal". I imagine that Assyrian Churches used fewer icons than the byzantine world and that each icon would have been considered very sacred due to the generations that venerated it. Therefore, I would tend to imagine they were treated more like relics.

After the 14th century it seemed that the church of the East entered into a deep nap and long period of silence until in the 19th century. It is not easy to give a satisfactory explanation for this long period of silence. Most probably, the conditions of extreme poverty, isolation, absence of theological schools, solitude from the great centers of learning and after the 16th century, and the bad position of the Middle East in general under Ottoman domination were important factors.

saints, see E. Delly, 'Le culte des saintes images dans l'église syrienne orientale', L'Orient Syrien, 1 (1956), 291-296.

⁴¹ Famagusta is a city on the east coast of Cyprus. It is the capital of the Famagusta District of Northern Cyprus. Famagusta was the island's most important port city, and a gateway to trade with the ports of the Levant, from where the Silk Road merchants carried their goods to Western Europe.

⁴² See the following source, http://famagustawalledcity.net/heritages_details?id=1.

⁴³ . See the Library of the Manuscripts of the Church of the East in Baghdad under the supervision of His Holiness Patriarch Mar Giwargis III.

Throughout of the ecclesiastical history the veneration of icons was already a theme in East Syrian Christian -Muslim discussions since several centuries. Important elements in this discussion were the comparison of the veneration of icons with comparable Muslim devotional practice, the emphasis on the intention behind the veneration of images, which is addressed to the person represented and not to the material.

The Icons in the churches did not only have a liturgical role, but were also for personal devotion: they convey to the faithful a feeling of nearness to the persons represented, whose deeds they are encouraged to imitate. Moreover, in my opinion I don't want use the icons and inside the church during holy Service in present time, in spite of it already existed icon of the Lord on the Altar, but we can put the pictures in hall or outside to venerate and visit them by people.