

Evidences of the existence of Images of Christ and Saints in the Church of the East

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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 Syrian Christians were iconoclasts, as has sometimes been suggested. Therefore, through this report, I'll provide several examples of the way icons have been written about by among ecclesiastical patristic 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.

Different Viewpoints about the non existence of Images.

Although the Assyrian Church does not currently make large use of icons, but they are indeed present in her tradition. The existence for the use of icons is plentiful, continues well into the 14th century, and is found in core patristic writings and liturgical texts.

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 was much to be said for this interpretation, especially from a Protestant point of view, as it made the Church of the East appear to be free of image veneration. Even when images were seen in Syrian churches Protestant missionaries viewed them as an innovation due to the influence of Rome.⁴

There is an argument said that veneration of icons is against the doctrine of the Church of the East. From the first glance, it does seem that may be true. During the 19th century Protestant missionaries who visited the East Syriac 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 concerning 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,

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

but was based on the age old, venerable tradition of the church of the east (the mother church of the Chaldeans).⁹

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

The veneration of Images in the theological thought of patristic

There are at least three texts which justify the veneration of images by ascribing this practice to Mari, venerated in the church of the east as the Apostle of Mesopotamia.

1. The acts of Mar Mari

First, in the Acts of Mari, we find the account of the correspondence between King Abgar the Black and Christ. Abgar, according *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 syriac 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

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

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.

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 the 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

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 منصرفاً نظر الى المومنين بالمسيح لا يعرفون السنن وازمان الاعياد فدون لهم ذلك ورتب وقاتها ودفعه اليهم وصور لهم شخص السيدة الظاهرة مارتريم وسيدنا المسيح على لوح واطلق لهم ان يجعل مثل ذلك في جميع البيع على خشب وفضه وذهب وشبهه وغير ذلك ليحيى قلوب المومنين بمشاهدة ذلك وقاس هذا القديس في ذلك بما فعله سيدنا لما سمح وجهه في منديل فاتطبع 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, 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. بركهادبشبا اربايا.

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:

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

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

¹⁴ أخبار بطاركة كرسي المشرق - ماري بن سليمان. Rome, 1899, p. 4.

Possessed an icon of the lord ܘܢܝܢܘܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ 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 ܘܢܝܢܘܢ before the icon and then he also greeted the cross.¹⁵

5. Sahdona. ܫܗܕܘܢܐ

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 Mandylion 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. ܓܒܪܝܐܝܠ ܩܬܪܝܐ

Gabriel bar Lipeh from Qatar is the Author of liturgical commentary, which was written in the early 7th century, his commentary divided into five ܡܡܪܝܢܐ. 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 ܘܢܝܢܘܢ 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 abrahamae bar Lipeh interpretation officiorum, CSCO 72, Paris-Leipzig, 1913, p. 175.

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-syriac grammarian and lexicographer Hasan ban Bahlul in the 10th century. We find under word Praka (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 Mart Maryam and other images.²⁷ This paragraph confirms that is the existence of images in all eastern churches.

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.²⁸ 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.)²⁹

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 Syriac authors that the images of Saints convey a real presence: kissing the icon is tantamount of conversing with the represented persons.

15. Catholicos Mar Denkha I (1265-1281). مار دنخا بن جرجس

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:

²⁷ R. Duval, Lexicon syriacum auctore Hassano Bar Bahlule II, paris, 1901, col, 1626. Catholicos Elias II.

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

²⁹ G. Giannazza, Elie II (1131). Kitab usul al-Din.

He built a church in the citadel of Arbil, which was very beautiful. For this reason, he had to endure many sufferings, caused by some insolent people ³⁰, for this church, he spent an immeasurable amount of gold and silver and decorated it with beautiful things and images ^{ܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ}, which exceeded his forces. He depicted in it the entire economy of our Lord Jesus, so those insane people³¹, could see it and would return to the level path of the right way.³²

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. ^{ܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܘܥܝܘܢܐ ܘܥܝܘܢܐ ܘܥܝܘܢܐ}

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 ^{ܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ} of saints and among them a cross.³³

17. Ishoyahb bar Malkon 13th Century. ^{ܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܘܥܝܘܢܐ ܘܥܝܘܢܐ ܘܥܝܘܢܐ}

He was bishop of Mardin, under the name of Joseph, in the first quarter of the 13th century and was later transferred to the metropolitan see of Nisibis, where he adopted the name of Isho'yahb. He is the author of several brief theological treatises, 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:

... 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

³⁰ By referring to the pagans, in this way suggesting that the Muslims had objected to the construction of this church.

³¹ Also, Mar Denkha I indicts 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.

³² Wallis Budge, *The Chronography of Gregory Abt/ "I-Faraj Barhebraeus*, London 1932, Vol 1., p. 448.

³³ Paul, Bedjan, *Historie de Mar Jab-alaha, patriarche et de Raban Sauma*, Paris-Leipzig, 1895, p. 29-30.

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.)³⁴

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.

18. Hayat Channal قناة 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.³⁵

19. Saliba ibn Yukhana. صليبا ابن يوحنا

He was an East-Syrian priest, living in Cyprus in the 1410 century, author of several theological treatises and responsible for the redaction of the already mentioned theological compilation, the books of secrets (اسفار الاسرار). The اسفار الاسرار 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 in an almost passionate way 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 one passing reference to the veneration of the icons:

³⁴ Paul Sbath, vingt traits philosophiques et apologetiques d auteurs arabes chretiens du IXe an XIVE siècle, Le Caire, 1929, pp.158.165.

³⁵ Hayattv.tv. See the video in 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."³⁶

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:

"What correctly said concerning this idea of the Christians adopting and venerating images in their churches and holy places is not according to the accusation launched against them by some ignorant people, sc. that they would adore them Let everybody who still has doubts in this matter and accuses them, know that the fact that they adopt them is not out of foolishness, ignorance or veneration for the substance of the pigments. The intention is rather commemorate the name of every one of the Saints and Martyrs whose person is depicted in times of need and through them to attain to what is agreeable to God. He be exalted and praised since they (i.e. the Saints) are more honored by God and nearer to Him.

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. And this is not foreign to or in contradiction with the power of God Most High.

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-

³⁶ 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.

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.³⁷

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_Syriac 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.

20. Abdisho Bar Brikha. *حَدِيثُ بَرِّكَا*

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.³⁸

Generally, Syrian Christians did tend to favor 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.³⁹ In addition, Western European travelers to the Mongol court make similar observations on the presence of images in East syriac Churches.⁴⁰

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

³⁷ *Assemani, Bibliotheca orientalis III.2, p.353.*

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ *Chronicle of the Constable Smpad*: see W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol invasion*, fourth edition, London, 1977, p. 485.

⁴⁰ Mingana, 'The early spread of Christianity', 316.

and images in honor of God and of the saints'.⁴¹ 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'.⁴²

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.⁴³

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 Famagusta⁴⁴. Syriac inscriptions associated with the church's remaining wall paintings.⁴⁵

23. Icons in India Church

One of the last Assyrian appointed Metropolitans to the Church of the East in India was His Grace, Metropolitan Anthony Thondanatta. When he arrived in India, he was shocked to see icons in all of the Chaldean-Assyrian Churches. He would go into the churches at night, remove and destroy all the icons. His goal was to recreate the Assyrian Church of the East within the Chaldean-Syrian Church in India.⁴⁶

24. Liturgical-Biblical Manuscripts

There are ample evidences of the existence of Images in the Liturgical-biblical manuscripts (Handwritings) especially in book of *ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ* before period of 14th century.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Book of the estate of the Great Kaan: see A.C. Moule, *Christians in China before the year 1550* (London: SPCK, 1930), 251.

⁴² Saeki, *Nestorian monument*, p. 166.

⁴³ *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 saints, see E. Delly, 'Le culte des saintes images dans l'église syrienne orientale', *L'Orient Syrien*, 1 (1956), 291-296.

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ See the following source, http://famagustawalledcity.net/heritages_details?id=1.

⁴⁶ . It was documented by His Grace Metropolitan Dr. Mar Aprem, the current Metropolitan in India, in his history of the church of the east.

⁴⁷ . See the Library of the Manuscripts of the Church of the East in Baghdad under the supervision of His Holiness Patriarch Mar Giwargis III.

Conclusion

The authentic Church of the East tradition as was all the branches of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church (Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic) included Icons in their church structures and spirituality; the icons were venerated during all the Holy Liturgies and Services within the church life (as well as the individual spiritual lives) of their believers. 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 Liturgy expresses 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 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.

It seemed that the church of 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 after the 14th century. 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.

Throughout of church history the veneration of icons was already a theme in East-Syrian-Muslim discussions since the century. 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 want not use icons and pictures 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.