

What Shall This Nation Be Called?

By: Isho Callo

The hottest topic of conversation within today's Assyrian community revolves around the new compound name that Zowaa and the Chaldo-Assyrian National Committee¹ have recently adopted for our beloved nation in Iraq. "Chaldo-Assyro" is not an appropriate name for a great nation with almost 6000 years of history. If we look back throughout history we will find that there is only one name that our people are consistently referred to. Should we change this name and thus our identity for the sake of a throne or a couple earthly promises?

There have been many great articles written by well-known people and posted on Zinda magazine's website². These articles discuss our national name and its legitimacy to us as people. However, I have also decided to put my thoughts on paper and speak out on this very important subject at this very crucial point in our history.

To begin with, let's define both names, i.e. Assyrian and Chaldean.

R. Payne Smith in the Syriac Dictionary³ defines the names as follows:

ܐܪܡܝܐ, both were the same Gentilic name, Aramean, but at some point after the epoch of the Seleucidae the name Syria, a shortened form of Assyria, came into use instead of Aramea, and Syrian was used in place of Aramean.

ܐܘܪܝܢܐ

, Assyria, the province and diocese of which Mosul was the capital.

ܐܘܪܝܢܐ, a Chaldean, astronomer, astrologer.

¹ <http://www.zindamagazine.com> June 16, 2003.

² <http://www.zindamagazine.com>

³ A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, Oxford, 1903.

ܚܠܕܐܝܢܐ, Chaldean knowledge, i.e. Astronomy, astrology.

In the Bible there are 82 references to Chaldean and 142 references to Assyrian. To my surprise the NIV Bible on eight different occasions uses the word “Asshur” instead of Assyrian. For example, in Genesis 2:14 – the first time that Assyrian is mentioned in the Bible – the NIV version uses Asshur instead of Assyrian.

De Lacy O’Leary⁴ talks about Trajan who “in 115 A.D. conquered Mesopotamia and made it a Roman province. The following year he invaded Parthia, advanced to the Tigris, occupied Adiabene in northern Mesopotamia and made it a province under the name of Assyria.”

Throughout history “Chaldean” has been synonymous with astronomer and “Chaldean knowledge” with astronomy. Isho’Dad of Merv⁵ – bishop of Hadatha of Atour – in his commentary on the Magi’s visit during the time of Christ’s birth, explains:

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[From all these, let it be known that the star wasn't a natural one, but a reflection of a star. Let not the company of astronomers be proud, for it is known that there is no truth to the knowledge of the Chaldeans.]

⁴ How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs. 1949

⁵ The Commentaries of Isho’Dad of Merv – 850 A.D., volume ii, Cambridge 1911.

Mar Ephrem the Great (303 – 373 A.D), in his hymns against Julian⁶, uses the term “Chaldeans” as follows:

They rejoiced that he was a Chaldean; they were jubilant that he was a soothsayer. Truth was its bulwark and fasting its rampart. The Magi came, threatening, but Persia was disgraced in them, [as] Babylon in the Chaldeans and India in the sorcerers...the chief sorcerers, the best of the Chaldeans....

Later, Mar Ephrem explains that Julian loved astrologers and because of this fact God surrendered him to the Persians. Here Mar Ephrem plays on the two senses of the word Chaldean:

...Who loved Chaldeans – [God] surrendered him to the Chaldeans. He worshipped the sun and fell before the servants of the sun.

In the Khudra Volume I⁷, Mar Ephrem the Great once again uses “Chaldean” as soothsayer.

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[Because the soothsayer is greedy all his promises are deceiving, the Chaldean (soothsayer) is starving (greedy) therefore he would mislead with good fortune until he gets all their money.]

⁶ Ephrem the Syrian hymns by Kathleen E. McVey. 1989.

⁷ Mar Narsai press, Trichur, India, 1960. Rogation of Ninevites, 2nd Reading, 1st Mootwa. Page 371

In the Old Testament, in the book of Daniel, there is a great description of Chaldeans as astrologers. In both Daniel 2:2,4 and Daniel 5:7,11, the New International Version (NIV) Study Bible⁸ uses the word “astrologers” instead of “Chaldeans,” thus making them synonymous.

The question remains how our beloved Assyrian followers of the Roman Catholic Church became known as Chaldeans? The following is from the Encyclopedia of the Orient⁹ in reference to the history of the Chaldean church:

16th century: The Nestorian community of India joins the Roman Catholic Church, after the influence of the Portuguese traders and colonists.

1551: When patriarch John Sulaka goes to Rome and professed his Catholic faith, many Nestorians [Church of the East] followed him. Others did not accept this conversion. The Catholic branch came to be called Chaldean, or Chaldean Catholic or East Syriac (referring to Nestor would not have been acceptable for the Catholic Church).

As a food for thought, in 1648 A.D. France declared itself protector of the Catholics living in the Ottoman Empire¹⁰.

The Catholic Encyclopedia¹¹ defines Chaldean as follows:

Chaldean Christians, the name of former Nestorians now reunited with the Roman church. Ethnologically they are divided into two groups (Turco-Persian and Indian), which must be treated apart, since in their vicissitudes one group differs considerably from the other. The first group is usually known as Chaldeans, the second as Christians of St. Thomas (also called the Syro-Malabar Church).

Name and territory of Chaldeans: Strictly, the name Chaldeans is no longer correct. In Chaldea proper, apart from Baghdad, there are now very few adherents of this rite, most of the Chaldean population being found in the cities of Kirkuk, Arbil, and Mosul, in the heart of the Tigris valley, in the valley of the Zab, in the mountains of Kurdistan. It is in the former ecclesiastical province of

⁸ The NIV Study Bible, Zondervan Publishing House. 1995.

⁹ Retrieved from <http://lexicoreint.com/e.o/chaldean.htm>. June 27, 2003.

¹⁰ Encyclopedia of the Orient. <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/maronite.htm>. June 27, 2003.

¹¹ Retrieved from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/o3559a.htm>. August 29, 2001

Ator (Assyria) that are now found the most flourishing of the Catholic Chaldean communities....

In 1551 the Catholicos Simeon bar Mama was succeeded by his nephew, Simeon Denha. According to a custom then about a century old, the latter was consecrated by Henanisho, the only remaining metropolitan. A numerous anti-synod met in Mosul, convoked by the Bishops of Arbil, Salamas, and Aderbaidjan. In agreement with the principal laymen they chose for bishop a monk of the monastery of Rabban-Hormizd Se' ud bar Daniel, known as Sulaga (Ascension). Probably at the suggestion of some Latin missionary, they sent him to Rome, where he received episcopal consecration from Julius III, with the title of Patriarch of the Chaldeans.

Nicholas Aljeloo¹² in his article “Who are the Assyrians?” explains:

Documents show that when Hurmizd Rassam was negotiating with the authorities to excavate one of the two tells at Nineveh, he was told that its legal name was “Ninua”. Though according to Xavier Koodapuzha, Mar Yuhannan Sulaqa, the first “Chaldean” Patriarch, was proclaimed Patriarch of “Mosul and Athour” on February 20th 1553 by Pope Julius III and Vatican documents originally refer to Sulaqa as the elected Patriarch of “the Assyrian Nation.” Henry Burgess explains that this should not sound odd as, “In many Syriac manuscripts, Mosul is styled as Athour and it is not uncommon practice with ecclesiastical writers of the present day to use the same phraseology.” Stephanie Dalley, though, writes that, “In Syriac Church literature ‘Athour’ is the name of Mosul, on the bank of the Tigris opposite Nineveh; but it also designates a metropolitan see, including Mosul, Nineveh and other towns.”

Mar Touma Audo¹³ in his article about ܐܘܪܝܢܐ [verb] uses ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܘܢܝܢܘܘܬܐ

ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܘܢܝܢܘܘܬܐ [East Syrians, Syrian people] referring to Nestorians living in the Middle East, i.e. Iraq, Iran, Turkey. In the book of liturgy of St. Addai and Mari published by the Chaldean Catholic church in 1900, they use the same terminology as East Syrians¹⁴.

With all of this historical evidence, one must be wondering how Mar Sarhad Jammo along with Mar Ibrahim can claim that Chaldeans are ethnically different than Assyrians.

¹² Retrieved from http://www.nestorian.org/who_are_the_assyrians.html. July 2, 2000

¹³ Grammaire de Langue Chaldeenne Moderne Dialecte d'Ourmiah. Urmia, Iran 1905.

¹⁴ Liturgy of Addai and Mari, published in Mosul, 1900.

Recently, I was browsing through the Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies (JAAS)¹⁵ and it got my attention that Paul Bedjan (1838-1920) refers to Assyrians of Iran and Ourmiah as Chaldean, even though we know for a fact that there is not one single Chaldean living in Ourmiah.

The late Mar Eshai Shimun in Appendix A of the book Marganitha¹⁶ under the title of “The name Syrian or Syriac”, writes:

The name Syrian and Syriac has been frequently used in the literature of the Church of the East, to denote Assyrian or Aramian; in fact, the racial name commonly used by the Assyrians to this day is “Suraye”, spelt with the letter “Alap”, but which is silent. If pronounced it would be Assuraye or Ashuraye, namely the descendents or followers of “Ashur”, which is undoubtedly the original of the name Assuri or Ashurein as used by the Armenians, Kurds and the Arabs to this day for our people, and the ancient Greeks Assuria, hence the European term “Assyria”. The present day Assyrians though using the name “Suraye” instead of the name “Aturaye”, which is the one of literary usage, yet have always recognized their language as pure “Aturaya” (Assyrian) in its origin.

In the liturgical calendar of the Church of the East there is a day of remembrance known as “Memorial of the Syrian Fathers”. Mar Sarhad Jammo in his 2000 liturgical calendar¹⁷ despite all of these facts has changed “Syrian fathers” to “Chaldean fathers”. One must wonder how all the brilliant fathers (of the Church of the East), whose knowledge and integrity no one to this day can dispute, didn’t know as much as Mar Sarhad Jammo? Why didn’t they ever use the word or refer to themselves as Chaldean? Once again, Mar Eshai Shimun¹⁸ explains the fact about Syrian fathers as follows:

¹⁵ A Bibliography of Neo-Aramaic Dialects. By Helen Younansardaroud, Ph.D. JASS vol. XVII no. 1, 2003. page 21

¹⁶ The book of Marganitha on the truth of Christianity by Mar O’Dishoo 1298 A.D., translated to English by Mar Eshai Shimun 1965.

¹⁷ 2000 Liturgical Calendar of the Diocese of St. Thomas the Apostle in the United States

¹⁸ The book of Marganitha on the truth of Christianity by Mar O’Dishoo 1298 A.D., translated to English by Mar Eshai Shimun 1965.

Therefore, when Mar Odisho speaks of Syrian Fathers, he uses the term in the sense of Assyrian, and consequently, all Syriac or Aramaic speaking Church Fathers preceding the Council of Ephesus, are considered doctrinally adherents of the Apostolic Catholic faith as maintained to this day by the Church of the East, just as are the Greek and Latin fathers of the same period as witnessed by their own confession.

Mar Sarhad Jammo in his calendar explains that the Chaldean Empire was the last national self-rule government by the people of Mesopotamia. Therefore, he calls the Assyrian alphabet and the Assyrian Fathers, the Chaldean alphabet and the Chaldean Fathers. Late Mar Raphael I Bidawid at the “Asian Synod: Seventh General Congregation”¹⁹ referred to the “Hsian-Fu Nestorian Monument” as Chaldean characters and to the Church of the East as Chaldean Church, although, Chaldean branch didn’t start until 16th century.

Zowaa and clergymen of the Chaldo-Assyrian National Committee of Iraq, despite all of these historical facts, are willing to change our national name to Chaldo-Assyro, and Zowaa in its statements explains that the Assyrian name was only given to us in the last 150 years, and Johann Marte and Gerhard Wilflinger²⁰ wrote we were called Assyrians by the Angelican missionaries.

Is it true that in the last 150 years we have been called Assyrians? Mar Eshai Shimun²¹ writes:

Throughout the Christian literature of the Church of the East, the glory that was Assyria, and their repentance at the preaching of the prophet Jonah, is hailed in history, epic poems, songs and hymns; calling upon their descendents to emulate them in the latter qualities. Indeed, so real and implicit was their knowledge of their Assyrian origin that in the Synod of Mar Eshuyow Catholicos Patriarch of the East, held in 585 A.D., among the names of the prelates present appears the following name: Representing Mar Khnana metropolitan of “Aturaye” (Assyrians), Mar Awa Qashisha and his Archdeacon, hereby places his signature.”

¹⁹ <http://www.zenit.org/english/asia/cong7.html> April 23, 1998.

²⁰ Syriac Dialogue, fourth non-official consultation on dialogue within the Syriac tradition, Vienna 2001. page 138.

²¹ The book of Marganitha on the truth of Christianity by Mar O’Dishoo 1298 A.D., translated to English by Mar Eshai Shimun 1965.

There were two Assyrian Patriarchs mentioned by Mar Odishoo in his book Marganitha²²: Mari Aturaya (967 – 1000 A.D.) and Odishu II (Bar Ars) Aturaya (1072 – 1090 A.D.). Also noted were Odisho bar Bahrees and Gewargis Metropolitan of Athur.

In the Khudra Volume I²³, 2nd mootwa of Wednesday, we read:

[*Accept oh Lord supplication of the Babylonians and Assyrians*]

Zowaa and the clergymen, along with the Chaldeans, claim that because the last dynasty in Iraq was Chaldean, we should be called Chaldean as well. My question to them is: when have you ever seen a nation change its name based on a dynasty that governs the land? If that is true then we should be called “Baath” because that was the very last dynasty governing over Iraq. Another example is in Iran. If you look at Iran’s history, there have been so many dynasties with different heritages, like Arabs and Mongols, governing over that country, but no one in Iran disputes or rejects the fact that he/she is an Iranian.

We have all heard about Addai and King Abgar. I don’t know if we truly believe it or just consider it a myth. J. B. Segal²⁴ writes this passage from the “Doctrine of Addai” about an Assyrian king:

And those who became disciples received from him the hand of priesthood, and in their own country of the Assyrians they found disciples, and made houses for prayer there in secret from fear of those who worshipped fire and adored

²² The book of Marganitha on the truth of Christianity. 1298 A.D.

²³ Mar Narsai press, Trichur, India, 1960. Rogation of Ninevites, Wednesday 2nd Mootwa. Page 452.

²⁴ Edessa ‘The Blessed City’. By J. B. Segal. 1970. page 79.

Also, Rev. Samuel Dinkha. The Teaching of Addai the apostle. 1991. page 61.

water. Narseh, 'king of the Assyrians', enquired of Abgar about the deeds of Addai, and 'was astonished and marvelled.'"

Do these people that claim that the last dynasty was Chaldean really mean it? Are they actually being honest with themselves, their beliefs and their teachings?

"William Shakespeare put it best when he wrote 'To thine own self be true.'"

TATIAN²⁵ (172 A.D.) was a native of Assyria as per Williamson and Segal.

In conclusion, as the late Mar Eshai Shimun states, "The facts in support of this thesis are many and overwhelming,"²⁶ and as Sargeant Joe Friday in the Dragnet TV-show would say "Just the facts, Ma'am". The above mentioned were just a few of the facts proving that we were, are, and will always be Assyrian and nothing else, which is a God-given name for our nation and not a man-made name that causes only confusion and destruction.

During Saddam's regime all Assyrians living in Iraq had a problem with his regime because they didn't want to be called Arabs – with all due respect – but now with the potential freedom and democracy of a new Iraq, we are compromising so easily. Are we learning a new lesson that in order to survive we have to compromise? If that is the case, then why didn't we compromise with Saddam's regime so we could have received millions of dollars to build our churches in the same way that our beloved Chaldeans did, who in return for his graciousness offered Saddam the golden key to the city of Detroit.

As Joshua declared before the assembly of Israelites at the shechem²⁷, "But as for me and my household", also I declare that we will be Assyrian, the handiwork²⁸ of God Almighty.

²⁵ G. A. Williamson. Eusebius, The History of the Church. 1965. page 419.

Edessa 'The Blessed City'. Page 35.

²⁶ The book of Marganitha. Page 155.

²⁷ Joshua 24:15

²⁸ Isaiah 19:25

“The men of Nineveh will stand up in judgement with this generation and condemn it.”²⁹

Friends, these are not my words or Mar Sarhad Jammo’s, they are the Lord’s, who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth.³⁰

²⁹ Matthew 12:41

³⁰ Genesis 1:1