

## Fable History

By Fred Aprim

February 22, 2004

I read the report of Vanessa Denha on the new The Chaldean Times, posted on Zinda Magazine (issue of 16 February 2004) under title "An Ancient People in Modern Times, Chaldeans: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" with great concerns.

As true Christians, we must follow God's commandments and what Jesus Christ teaches us. Truthfulness and honesty must be the foundation of our leaders' activities, whether religious, civic, or political.

Some four years ago, and while preparing for the U.S. Census 2000, few members of the Chaldean Catholic Church headed by Mr. Ghassan Hanna Shathaya, claimed that the Chaldeans were the descendents of the ancient Chaldeans and that they were a separate group than the Assyrians. With specific scholarly-based articles, we proved that such claim was false and that the modern-day Chaldeans could not be the descendents of the ancient Chaldeans.

Soon after, a shift in tactic slowly began to shape up. His Grace Bishop Sarhad Jammo, having realized that they have absolutely no case with the above claim, modified their claim and began to claim that the modern-day Chaldeans were the descendents of all the ancient people of Mesopotamia (Iraq). Bishop Jammo states, as the above article puts it, quote: "The Chaldeans of Beth Nahreen, once known as Mesopotamia, present day Iraq, east Syria, and south east Turkey, are a living continuation of all the indigenous people of that region, regardless of their tribal names," unquote. With this, the Bishop speaks in general and under vague terms that it is hard to challenge because the argument proves that Chaldeans belongs to no specific ancestry and that their origin is lost in history. There is no other way to describe it. When people say that their ancestry is, for example, a mix of Arab, Persian, and Turk, they in reality have no idea where they belong.

His Grace Bishop Jammo brings the issue that the Chaldeans speak Aramaic. This fact on its own does not prove anything, especially if we keep into consideration what his grace' is trying to prove. Language on its own merit proves nothing. The Chaldean congregation predominantly speaks Arabic as well, does that prove that the congregation is Arab? The Chaldeans speak Aramaic because they are simply Nestorian Assyrians who speak Aramaic (or a dialect of it) for 2,750 years. The Mandaeans of southern Iraq speak Aramaic as well; therefore, I suggest that his grace takes the Mandaean name then since the presence of Mandaeans in Iraq is reported much earlier than the modern Chaldeans. It is interesting that the Mandaeans who live in the exact region where the ancient Chaldeans lived and speak the language of the ancient Chaldeans, do not call themselves Chaldeans; however the Catholic Assyrians who always lived 300 – 400 miles to the north do! I have asked Mr. Shathaya repeatedly and for over four years now to provide specific references where they indicate clearly that ancient Chaldeans, and under this specific name, migrated to Assyria; however, I am still waiting.

Vanessa Denha claims in the above article that His Grace Bishop Sarhad Jammo is a historian with a doctorate degree. I need to correct the writer and assert that his grace is not a qualified historian; his degree is in theology, i.e. religious matters. He is not qualified to make such claims when he is not providing serious scholarly material to back up his claims. What his grace provides is very general information that any other group in Iraq can provide. Some of today's Arab Moslems in southern Iraq specifically can claim that they are the descendents of the Sumerians, Babylonians, Arameans, Chaldeans, and Kassites; but what does that prove when they speak a language; live a culture; and practice a religion that are completely different from that of the groups mentioned above. At least Assyrians speak a language that in certain ways is linked to ancient Assyrians; practice certain cultural practices that have pre-Christian traces; and most importantly, they lived in the same land uninterruptedly.

Vanessa writes later, quote: "It was not until 1552 that a large number of people came back to union with Rome. In order to distinguish them from the rest of the church that remained separate, the term 'Chaldean

Catholic Church' was given," unquote. I am not sure if this quote is for His Grace Bishop Jammo or it is hers, either way, the quote contains many false statements. There are many known facts, attested by many qualified scholars and historians. Here are some of them that are in contradiction with the above quote:

1. The Vatican did not give this name Chaldeans to the Nestorians of Mosul in the beginning. In fact, it gave it to the Nestorians of Cyprus first who converted to Catholicism in 1445.
2. It was in 1553, that the Vatican gave that title to Youhanna Sulaqa, who did not return to Mosul rather to Diyar Bakir in Turkey.
3. Those who joined Rome and became Chaldeans in Diyar Bakir, were not large group in (1552). In fact, almost all of those who became Chaldeans later returned to the Nestorian fold.
4. It was only in 1830 that the Chaldeans (Catholic Nestorians) began to find foothold in Mosul with the conversion of Youhanna Hurmiz, who became the first patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church.
5. To distinguish those who followed Rome from the original Nestorian body (Church of the East), Rome did not only establish the Chaldean Catholic Church, but gave the congregation the name Chaldeans as well.
6. All historical and church records show clearly that until early 1800s, there, for all practical purposes, were no Chaldeans or any Chaldean bishops in Mosul.
7. The censuses, official and estimated, clearly indicate that it was only on the eve of World War I (1914 – 1918) that the numbers of Chaldeans and Nestorians were almost identical. Records indicate that it was post World War I that the Chaldeans began to surpass the Nestorians in numbers. This was because of many reasons including: The greater numbers of Nestorians that perished in the Great War; the protection offered by the French monks; greed for money; and various support services that the Vatican monks were providing at the time for the Catholics. I am not suggesting that the Catholics did not suffer losses during the war; however, comparatively, the Nestorians lost much more than the Chaldeans.

The reader can read (only for example) the figures provided by the following historians, scholars, and theologians who prove the above:

- a) David Wilmshurst, "The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East: 1318 – 1913." In *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*. Vol. 582. Tomus 104. (Lovanii: Peeters, 2000).
- b) Rev. George Percy Badger, "The Nestorians and their Rituals." vol. I, Darf Publishers Limited, London, 1987, first published in 1852.
- c) Attwater, Donald. *The Christian Churches of the East*. Vol. 1: Churches in Communion with Rome. Second Printing. 1935. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1948.
- d) Sarah D. Shields. "Mosul Before Iraq: Like Bees making Five-Sided Cells." New York: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- e) H.L. Murre-Van Den Berg, "From Spoken to a Written Language." Leiden, 1999.

The article tries next to explain why these Nestorian Assyrians were Chaldeans and states, quote: "They were not Romans, Medes, Turks, Mongols, or Macedonians. Therefore, the name Chaldean has come to bear national significance with its linguistic, cultural and religious connections," unquote. The above explanation is poor and scanty; it means nothing in a scholarly argument. Imagine if a Korean stated: Well,

I am not Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, or Hindu; therefore, I am Korean. How would the reader evaluate such statement?

Then the article brings Mary C. Sengstock, Ph.D. professor of sociology, to say few words. Sengstock of course wrote her piece from the sociologist point of view (nothing to do with real history) to support the group of the separatist Chaldeans who started the Census 2000 mess. A sociologist cannot prove the historical background of any people. A sociologist (who in certain cases is paid by a certain group to conduct a study about that group) interviews people and observes their lives and then draws conclusions based on the people's testimonies and statements. Well, how can a sociologist prove who the modern Chaldeans are truly by simply speaking to people who are bias about the issue and most importantly do not have the appropriate education to make a sound decision; people who are greatly influenced by Church!

The rest of the article is general information about Iraq that bares no relation of proving how or why these Chaldeans should be called as such.

I need to remind Venassa Denha that while she is embarking on this project, she should try to gain some credibility for her publication by providing the people with solid information; this is the moral obligation of a true journalist. Today, we are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and many educated people find it offensive when such nonsense is being published in newspapers. I ask His Grace Bishop Sarhad Jammo in humbleness and in Christian spirit to concentrate on his religious duties and leave such issues to those qualified in the field to address. I support the POLITICAL decision in Iraq that our people have agreed upon, i.e. using the term Chaldo-Assyrians, because I understand the importance of unity today and in these crucial circumstances. However, that does not mean that I will accept fable history to be propagated. The Nestorians and Chaldeans are one people; they are the indigenious people of Assyria and not from any other region. It is in Assyria where they have always resided from times immemorial; they are the descendents of the ancient Assyrians.