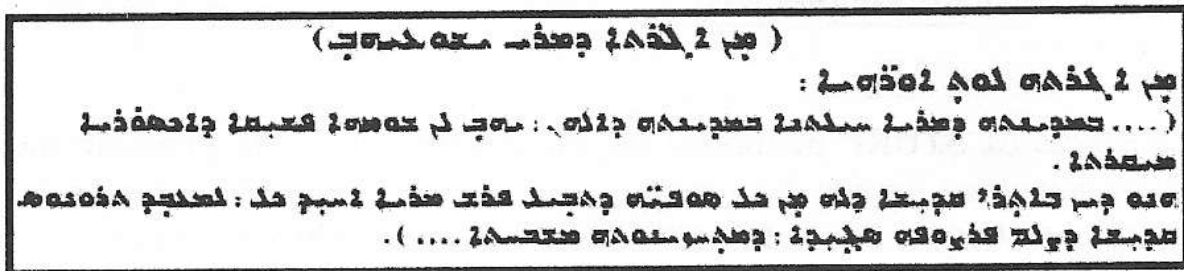


A Hitherto Unknown 7th century reference to the image of Edessa

In the current international political climate Baghdad might seem an unlikely place from which to expect any fresh evidence in support of the Shroud's authenticity. However amidst an otherwise overwhelmingly Islamic environment Archbishop Gewargis Silwa lives in Baghdad as head of the Church of the East in Iraq, the successor to the Nestorian church. And he has notified us that amongst a collection of letters written by Archbishop Isho-yahb, the head of the Nestorians between the years 620-658 AD, he has come across a hitherto unnoticed letter addressed to Edessa's Nestorian community. This unmistakably refers to the city's preservation of the Image of Edessa, or Mandylion, which as most members are aware, is identified by this Editor and others as our Turin Shroud. According to Archbishop Gewargis' translation from the Syriac, the relevant portion of the text reads as follows:

... in the city of the Mighty Lord, the city of our God [i.e. Edessa], He granted us the simple designation of venerable exile (banishment). In other words, in the holy place which the Omnipotent God chose from among all the countries of the world so as to render it a sanctified throne for *the Image of his adorable face and his glorified incarnation*.



Text in the original Syriac

Already the discovery of this reference, which comes from a three part edition of Mar Ishuyah's Pastoral Epistles, puts it second on the list of history's very earliest mentions of the Image (the earliest-known otherwise being a Syriac hymn dateable to c.569). But what makes it even more special is that it refers to the image as of Jesus' 'face and his glorified *incarnation*'. This thereby further supports the argument that the Edessa cloth imprint was of Jesus' whole body, and not just of the face, as has been all too commonly maintained. The Nestorians, it should be pointed out, were a major denomination in Edessa during the time that the Image was properly housed there - mostly in the Orthodox Church's St. Sophia Cathedral - between the early 6th century and its transfer to Constantinople in 944. The other two denominations were the Orthodox and the Monophysites. Although the three denominations were divided by deep theological differences, the late J.B. Segal, in his book *Edessa: The Blessed City*, suggested that all three kept artists' copies of the Image, and shared a common veneration for it.