

Assyrian Printing Presses in Iraq During the 20th Century

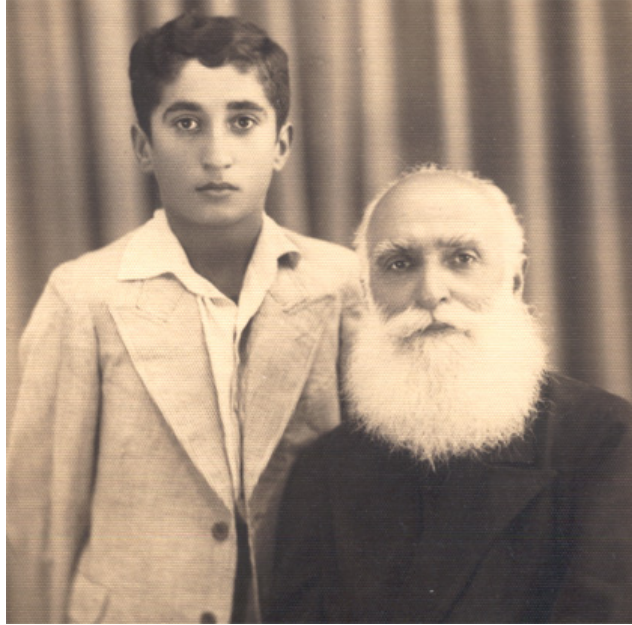
My presentation will be limited to Assyrian printing presses in Iraq during the 20th Century. I shall not address the press of the Dominicans established in Mosul earlier and which was subsequently taken over by the Chaldean Church.

The documented evidence for the most part confirms that around 50,000 Assyrians arrived at Baqouba in 1918 after their exodus from their home in the Hakkari and the plains of Urmia. They were settled in tents at a large temporary camp built by the British Army and the Indian regiments who served under it.

The Assyrians were miraculously able to recover quickly from their exhaustion and realized that they had to adapt to their new situation. Church leaders and tribal chieftains decided to establish schools and a printing press.

My father's uncle, Rev. Zakaria Lazar d'bet Benyamin, managed to acquire a big tent which he utilized as a class room to teach Syriac language. Shamasha Dawid Somo d'bet Benyamin (my father) would fill in during his uncles's absence. Amongst his students was Deacon Mansour Darmo who would become the Metropolitan of the Church of the East in Malabar – India, under the name of Mar Thooma Darmo. The same Mar Thooma Darmo would later serve as the Patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East in Iraq, following his personal dispute with Mar Eshai Shimon XXI in the early 1960's.

A committee was established in Baqouba to raise funds to cover the cost of types and a printing press. Rev. Zakaria contributed one Gold Majeedi which was an official currency of the Ottoman Empire.



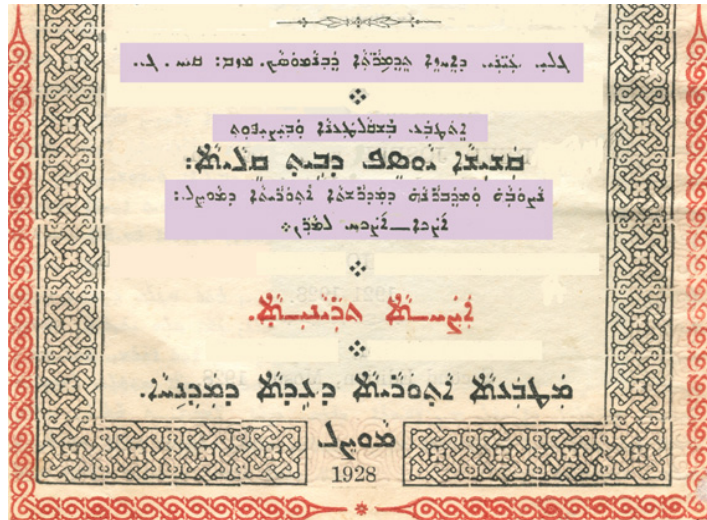
Rev. Joseph De Kelaita and his son Barnwa

Deacon Joseph De Kelaita, who had acquired considerable experience in the fields of printing and publishing both in Urmia and Britain, was nominated to take over these responsibilities and he set forth to Trichur in South India. With the help of Mar Timatheous, Metropolitan of the Church of the East there, he engaged a team of nine Indian craftsmen to produce matrices for casting the types.



Deacon Joseph De Kelaita and Indian Craftsmen

The production of the types took approximately two years. Deacon Joseph de Kelaita then returned to Mosul in Northern Iraq with 3 sets of Syriac types, 12 and 24 pt. in Eastern Syriac, 48 pt. in Estrangelo and five sets of Latin Fonts as well as a large manually operated platen press. These slides were taken from the book of Pardaisa daa-dein (Paradise of Eden).



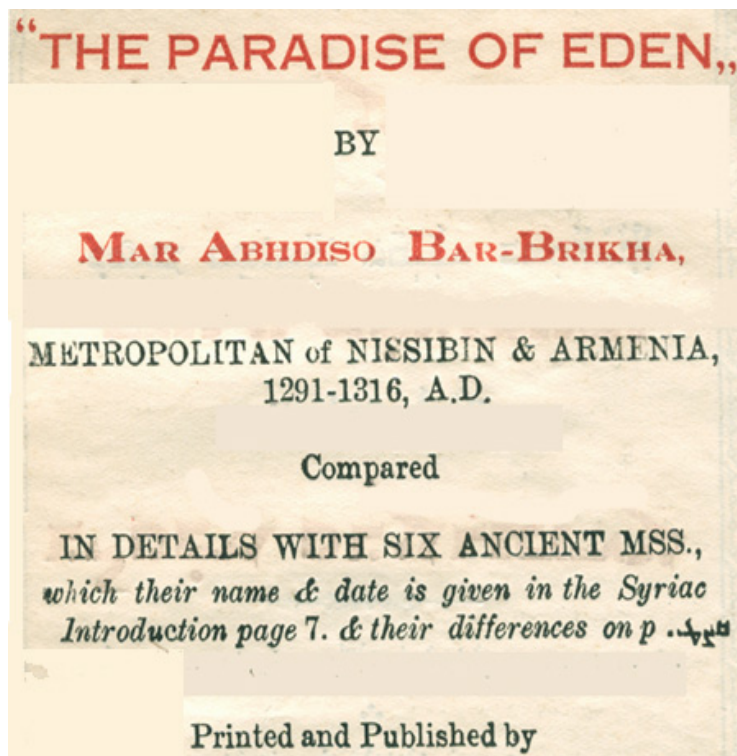
East Syriac Types, 12 pt (highlighted in purple).



East Syriac Types, 24 pt (highlighted in green).



Estrangelo Types 48 pt (highlighted in green).



Latin Types brought by Deacon Joseph De Kelaita from India

He recruited Shamasha Dawid who had vast knowledge of the Syriac language, and trained him to take over full responsibilities for the press. Dawid would subsequently become the over-all supervisor. From time to time, temporary workers were hired to assist.



Shamasha Dawid d'beth Benyamin 1884 - 1967

In addition to the printing press that Rev. de Kelaita established in 1921, he also established the nucleus of the first Assyrian School which graduated over 1,000 students between the years 1921 – 1933. (Slide 5)



Assyrian School 1932 – 1933

Notwithstanding his simple printing facilities -- a far cry to modern technology -- one can't help but admire his achievements in less than one decade. Most of the books that he printed were liturgy books.

2: **مكتبة ابيه في بغداد 1921 - 1931.**

1. **مكتبة ابيه في بغداد (سنة 1921 و 1931 من ابيته في بغداد).**
2. **كتاب في الفقه. مكتبة ابيه في بغداد.**
3. **مكتبة ابيه، في الفقه في بغداد.**
4. **كتاب في الفقه، في بغداد.**
5. **كتاب في الفقه، في بغداد.**
6. **كتاب في الفقه.**
7. **كتاب في الفقه.**
8. **كتاب في الفقه.**
9. **كتاب في الفقه (مكتبة ابيه).**
10. **كتاب في الفقه (مكتبة ابيه).**
11. **كتاب في الفقه (مكتبة ابيه).**
12. **كتاب في الفقه (مكتبة ابيه).**
13. **كتاب في الفقه (مكتبة ابيه).**
14. **كتاب في الفقه (مكتبة ابيه).**
15. **كتاب في الفقه (مكتبة ابيه).**

In 1927, Mar Awimalik Timatheous, Metropolitan of the Church of East in Malabar, India, returned to Mosul with the hope of settling the differences that erupted between the prelates of the church after the consecration of Mar Eshai Shimon XXI in Baqouba as patriarch at the age of 12.

His efforts failed, and he subsequently consecrated Deacon Joseph as a priest, thus creating another schism. The church which was practically under the influence of Lady Surma, claimed the ownership of the printing press and took the matter to court. It was eventually ruled that the press should be handed over to the head of the church, namely, by Mar Eshai Shimon XXI.

Everything related to the press, including the collated but unbound books, were taken away. My father, Shamasha Dawid, described the

handling of types as ‘barbaric’. He said that the types were dropping off their holes in the board. Before taking over, ‘Zakaria’ (nick name Patti), the brother of Mar Timatheous said to Shamasha Dawid: *“Tell Reverend Joseph not to appeal the decision of the court.”* He also commented sarcastically: *“Let them take the press and the types and use them as shelves on which their chickens will rest during the night.”*

After the massacre of Simmel, a large number of Assyrians chose to leave Iraq and settle in Syria. All that had been previously seized was also taken to Syria.

Reverend Joseph de Kelaita then bought a set of types from the Dominican Press in Mosul and established a new press under the name of ‘Diqlath (Tigris) Printing Press. The East Syriac types were in sizes 12, 18, 24 pt. and Estrangelo in size 72 pt.



East Syriac Types 12, 18, 24 pt. and Estrangelo 72 pt.
obtained by Reverend Joseph de Kelaita from Dominican Press

It is not difficult to see that the energy expended by Rev. Joseph in the second quarter of the 20th century to print new liturgy books dwindled

significantly after the seizure of the Assyrian press. The Assyrian School was eventually closed.

During the third decade of last century, he printed the books shown in the following slide.

- ܐ: ܦܘܚܝܟܘܢ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ : 1932 - 1952.
16. ܡܘܢܝܢ ܕܡܘܢܝܢ ܗܘܢܝܢܝܢ (ܡܘܢܝܢ ܗܘܢܝܢܝܢ).
 17. ܡܘܢܝܢ ܕܡܘܢܝܢ ܗܘܢܝܢܝܢ.
 18. ܡܘܢܝܢ ܕܡܘܢܝܢ ܗܘܢܝܢܝܢ (ܡܘܢܝܢ ܗܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܘܢܝܢ ܗܘܢܝܢܝܢ).
 19. ܡܘܢܝܢ ܕܡܘܢܝܢ ܗܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܗܘܢܝܢܝܢ.

With the onset of World War II, all activity came to a stand still. Rev. Joseph passed away on 25th February 1952.

The press and Syriac types were then taken over by André de Kelaita, a cousin of Rev. Joseph, and moved to Baghdad. They were used for a couple of years to print the Church Calendar.

It is worth mentioning that in 1950, my friend Mr. Youel Baaba who is with us today, used Rabi Youkhanan types to typeset Mishael Lazar Issa's book **ܘܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܕܐ ܣܘܦܝܐ** (A Jewel in Front of Pigs), and published it at his own expense.

When Rabi Youkhanan retired, his son sold the types to Shamasha Youkhanan Moushi Lazar of Kirkuk Printing Press and I will return to that later.

Nineveh Printing Press

After World War II, Sahmasha Dawid, who was a close acquaintance of Mar Estefan Kacho the Metropolitan of the Chaldean Church at Mosul, obtained the latter's verbal approval to acquire a set of types that the Chaldean Church had taken over from the Dominicans. After he sorted out the types and the quantities needed of every character, he was informed that the types are church property and therefore cannot be sold or given to any other entity.

However, Shamasha Dawid had earlier printed two books at the Chaldean Press:

- Story of Youkhanan bar Malke (John son of Kings)
- Story of Mar Zaia, the Saint of the Assyrian Jeelo tribe, at the expense of Mr. Vaseely, a wealthy Assyrian in Mosul and agent of a tobacco company in which one of his relatives named Leera had a large number of shares.

In 1951 Sahmasha Dawid moved from Mosul to Kirkuk. After consulting with his younger brothers Shamasha Gewargis and Moushi d'bet Benyamin d'Ashita, they decided to acquire a set of types from India. Mar Thooma Darmo, Metropolitan of the Church of the East, supplied them with a set of East Syriac types in sizes 18, 24, 48 pt. and in Estrangelo 48 pt.



Shamasha Dawid then obtained a small used platen press from Mosul. These preparations were made in advance of obtaining the necessary license from the authorities to operate a printing press. When he applied for the license, the intelligence service department in Kirkuk refused to grant him the necessary clearance. Shamasha Dawid then informed his cousin Rev. Odisho d'bet Benyamin of the difficulties he encountered. The latter took the matter up with the Chief of Protocol of the Hashemite Royal Palace, Tahseen Pasha Qadri, with whom he had a very close relationship. The license was mailed to Shamasha Dawid from Baghdad within two weeks without even completing the rest of the official formalities.

In less than two months, the wheel of the press started turning. The first book that was printed was "Shana" (Beehive) by Shamasha Gewargis d'bet Benyamin, which contained short poems and sage sayings.

This press opened the door for many Assyrians and Chaldeans to have their books printed. But the most significant achievement was the printing of Evangalion M'parsha which covered select readings from the four Gospels, read during Sunday and holiday masses. This was followed a couple of years later, by a printing of the Book of Qdham wadhawathar (Before and After) which covered afternoon, night and morning prayers. The latter was printed with the approval of Mar Eshai Shimon XXI.

Shamasha Dawid was assisted by his two sons -- myself and my late brother Yoab -- my cousin Benyamin d'bet Benyamin and later by Mr. Geeso Toma and William Shlimon d'bet Benyamin.

In late 1964, Shamasha Dawid was rushed to Baghdad due to illness and he passed away in February 1967. Thereafter, his brother Shamasha Gewargis, upon his work retirement from Mosul, moved the types and the press to Baghdad. During the shift, the records of the books printed in the press were lost. There he printed two liturgical books for The Church of the East. Among other books he printed was his most controversial book "Marganyate Damyatroora" (Pearls of Virtue) criticizing the Assyrian church and tribal leaders who, in his opinion, were the cause of the schism that split the church in 1960's. This book led Shamasha Shlimon, the brother of Mar Yousip Khnanisho, to threaten Shamasha Gewargis, warning him that its distribution would lead to his conviction and imprisonment by Nadhem Gzar the head of Security Services.

Another achievement of Nineveh Press in Baghdad was the printing of the appendix of Mar Yacoub Manna's "Chaldean-Arabic" dictionary,

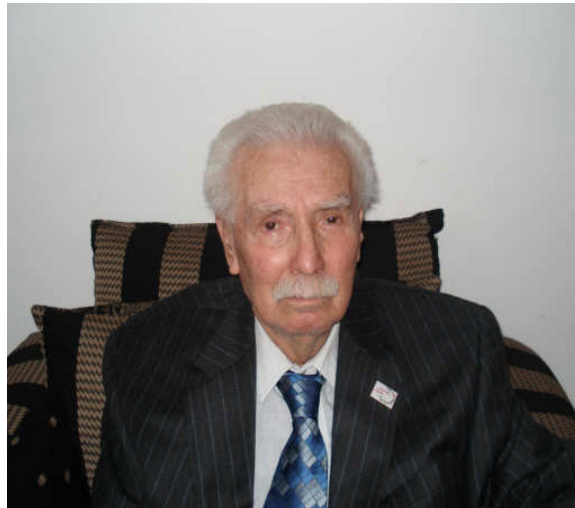
republished by Babel Center Publications in Beirut in 1975 under the supervision of His holiness Mar Rafael Bidawid, then the Bishop of Beirut.

Shortly after this, most of the types were sold to The Ancient Church of the East, headed by Mar Addai II. To the best of my knowledge, the types were not utilized at all.

The smaller and unsold portion of the types was brought to Chicago where Shamasha Gewargis printed a score of different books and the monthly newspaper called “The Voice of Assyrians” run by his son-in-law. The press, also under the original name of “Nineveh Press”, ceased its operation in the late 1980’s due to Shamasha Gewargis’s illness.

Kirkuk Printing Press

In the mid-1950's, Shamasha Youkhanan Moushi Lazar established a commercial Arabic and English press in Kirkuk under the name "Coronation Press." After the toppling of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq in 1958, the name was changed to Kirkuk Printing Press. Shamasha Youkhanan obtained in the early 1960's a set of East Syriac types, size 18 only, from the Catholic Press in Lebanon.



Shamasha Youkhanan Moushi Lazar

The diacritics of the types were independent from the characters. When composing, they were placed after the characters over- or underlapping them. According to the owner of the press, only a small Syriac/Arabic grammar book was printed with those types. They were consequently sold to the Chaldean Church in Kirkuk and then moved to Badhdad.

In the mean time, Shamasha Youkhanan acquired the types of Rabi Youkhanan Daniel de Baz. The owner, who is now here in Chicago, informed me recently that they were never used. They still exist at that press which is now run by his elder son.

Mirza Press

Established in 1955 by Moshi Tooma Nissan in Baghdad. The press was primarily engaged in commercial printing in Arabic and English. The owner later obtained a set of types from the Church of East (Mar Narsai Press) in India.



Mr. Moshi Tooma Nissan

According to the information provided by his son who is now in Australia, the Syriac types were used for church and school related printings such as school reports and certificates, baptism and wedding certificates, wedding invitations. No books including liturgy were printed.

In 1969, the owner sold the press in to his cousin and migrated to Australia.

Press of the Metropolitanate of the Assyrian Church of the East

Mr. Leera, the wealthy Baghdad Assyrian I previously mentioned, acquired from Mar Narsai Press in India, a set of East Syriac types comprising of sizes 18 and 48 pt. They were never used and before his death, he donated them to Mar Yousip Khanisho Metropolitan of the Church of the East (now called Assyrian Church of the East.)

The only book printed with those types was **ܚܘܒܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ** (Burial Service) in 1980. However, this press reproduced twice by offset the book

of ܡܘܩܕܝܡܘܢܐ (Before and After) originally printed by Nineveh Printing Press in Kirkuk and the Metropolitan of this church, Mar Gewargis Sliwa, utilized Mr. Leera's types to print a short "Foreword" for the reproduced book, in which he acknowledged that it was a reproduction of the one originally printed by Nineveh Press in Kirkuk.

As a concluding remark, it is worth mentioning that with the introduction of EGA (Enhanced Graphic Array) in the early 1980's, to drive the monitors of personal computers, and printers having the capability to download custom fonts, it became clear that non-Latin languages could be displayed on PC monitors and printed. This opened up the possibility of using PCs with fonts developed for almost any language.

In early adaptation of this technology, whilst I was still in Kuwait, and with the help of Mr. Sunil Sivanand, (now the Director of Acette Technologies based in Dubai Internet City), developed a word processing capability for the Syriac language.

The challenges of handling this on a DOS platform were great, as font handling was not as simple as in the Microsoft Windows platform. Earlier I had done extensive work developing the graphics fonts for building a Syriac electric typewriter, but this could not be completed as the costs appeared to be prohibitive for the small number of 100 typewriters to be manufactured by Hermes Company in Switzerland as special order for the Assyrian community in Australia. The availability of those fonts made it easier for the project to be done. The work involved building and enhancing several items of software on an IBM 80286 computer with an EGA graphic adaptor and a Canon Laser Printer. Separate font editors were developed for the PC screen and printer, which were used to build the fonts for the low resolution screen display and a much higher resolution font for printing on a 150 dpi Canon laser printer. Immediately after the development of the fonts, I defined the context rules of the Syriac language and Mr. Sivanand programmed them along with a text handling capability to arrive at the first version of a word processor for the Syriac language.

This word processor was utilized by me in 1989 for publishing the Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society – based in Chicago, and shortly afterwards for printing a book of 1016 pages which contained all articles published in seventy issues of "Gilgamesh" magazine distributed in Tehran – Iran from 1952 to 1960.

With the introduction of Microsoft Windows and Word, I developed 11 sets of East and West Syriac True Type fonts utilizing a software named Fontographer. These fonts are now being used to print the Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies. They are available for free distribution. They will eventually be converted to Open Type Fonts meeting the new Unicons.

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