

The girdle was taken later to Urhoy-Edessa with his relic, and then to Homs by a monk where it is kept up to the present day in our Church the Mother of the Girdle (Um Al-Zunnar).



• The Syriac Church blessed by the Upper Room:

According to the Holy Bible and Christian tradition and history, the Upper Room is the site where the apostles of Jesus received the Holy Sacraments (the Body and the Blood of the Lord), and where the Lord washed the feet of His disciples, and where the apostles were praying when the Holy Spirit descended upon them on Pentecost Day. Nowadays, it is the famous St. Mark Monastery in old Jerusalem city.

• It is the first church who translated the Holy Bible into the Aramaic/Syriac Language:

Aramaic primacy is the view that the Christian New Testament and/or its sources were originally written in the Aramaic language. Aramaic Primacy is asserted over and against Greek Primacy, as is generally accepted. The Syriac Orthodox Church and other Syriac/Aramaic-speaking churches have historically claimed that the Peshitta is the original text of the New Testament.

The New Testament was translated into Syriac/Aramaic language by the Jews, the original first Christians at the end of the first and beginning of the second century. As one

book, the earliest New Testament translation into Syriac was probably Tatian's Diatessaron ('one through four') written about AD 175, which is a continuous harmony of the four gospels into a single narrative.. It became the official Syriac Gospel for a time, and received a beautiful prose commentary by St. Ephrem the Syrian, who remains the chief witness to its content.



• The Syriac Orthodox Church is quite unique for many other reasons.

Firstly: it presents a form of Christianity, which is Semitic in nature, with a culture not far from the one Christ Himself experienced.

Secondly: it employs in its liturgy the Syriac language, an Aramaic dialect, to the Aramaic spoken by Christ and the Apostles.

Thirdly: its liturgy is one of the most ancient, and has been handed from one generation to another.

Fourthly: and most importantly, it demonstrates the unity of the body of Christ by the multiethnic nature of its faithful: A visit to your local Syriac Orthodox Church in Europe or in America would demonstrate, for example, the blend of Near Eastern and Indian cultures in the motifs and vestments of clergy. The Syriac Orthodox faithful today live primarily in Middle

Eastern countries and the Indian State of Kerala, with many communities in the Diaspora.

Aside from their ecclesiastical role, Syriac Churchmen have contributed to world civilization. As early as the fourth century, religious institutions and schools were set up in monasteries throughout Syria and Mesopotamia. Monks and scholars were busy studying the sciences of the Greeks, commenting on and adding to them. It is no surprise that the Arabs who wanted to acquire Greek knowledge turned to Syriac scholars and churchmen when they conquered the Near East at the end of the seventh century. Arab caliphs commissioned Syriac scholars to translate the sciences of the Greeks into Arabic. In his film *Forgotten Christians*, Christopher Wenner describes the impact of Syriac scholars and Churchmen when he describes the school at Deir az-Za'faran monastery, "It was through the monks here that the Arabs received Greek learning, and it was the Arabs of course who passed it back to Europe. Had it not been for the Syriac monks, we in Europe might never have had a renaissance."

That's why the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch's members are proud of their Church, its history and Holy Fathers.

We hope this brochure helps you better understand the historical and beautiful aspects of our Syriac Orthodox Church, published by the Archdiocese of the Western US 2009.



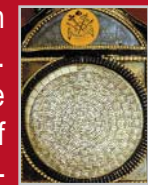
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UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE SYRIAC ORTHODOX CHURCH

What makes the Syriac Orthodox Church Quite Unique

• The foundation of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch:

The Syriac Orthodox Church is quite unique for many reasons. First, its foundation can be traced back to the very dawn of Christianity. It is the first established church in Christendom which gathered converted Jews and Gentiles in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and second church after that of Jerusalem.



• St. Peter the Apostle established a Holy See of Antioch:

According to ecclesiastical history, tradition, and Church Fathers, St. Peter is the one who established the Holy See of Antioch and became its first bishop (Patriarch) around 37 AD. St. Peter's successors were: St. Evodius for the converted Jews and St. Ignatius the Illuminator for the converted Gentiles. The Holy See of Antioch was succeeded by a line of distinguished Patriarchs, most of whom amazed the world with their sanctity, wonderful writings and other accomplishments in many fields.

• Become the first, oldest in Christianity:

The Holy See of Antioch then becomes the first, the oldest, and the most famous Church in Christianity. It was the foundation of the Christianity in the East and the mother of the gentile churches and the headquarters of Christianity in the East.

• The first Church whose faithful are called Christians:

The Syriac Orthodox Church is proud to be the origin of the word "Christian"; it was in Antioch, after all, that the followers of Jesus Christ were first called Christians as we are told in the New Testament, "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." (Acts 11:26).



• It is the first church called as Catholic (Universal) Church:

St. Ignatius of Antioch, third bishop (Patriarch) of Antioch, was the first to use the term of Catholic in the meaning of universal. It was after he was able to bring together those who became Christian from the Jews and Gentiles into one Church in Antioch. Thus, he called the church of Antioch Catholic (Universal) Church. It is from the word (καθολικός), which is where the word "catholic" originates.

When St. Ignatius wrote the Letter to the Smyrneans he roughly used the word "catholic," he used it as if it were a word already in use to describe the Church. This has led many scholars to conclude that the appellation "Catholic Church" with its ecclesial connotation may have been in use in Antioch as early as the last quarter of the first century.

• Syriac Kingdom of Edessa is the first Christian Kingdom:

Syriac Christianity was not centered just in Antioch, the Roman capital of Syria. In fact, Syriac Christianity can be traced further East in Mesopotamia. As local tradition tells us, Christianity was received in Edessa during the time of the Apostles. This is reported in a number of documents including Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. He gives us the text of a correspondence between the city's king Abgar Ukomo, and none other than the Lord Jesus Himself:

“Abgar Ukomo, the toparch, to Jesus the good Savior who has appeared in the district of Jerusalem, greetings. I have heard

concerning you and your cures, how they are accomplished by you without drugs and herbs ... And when I heard of all these things concerning you I decided that it is one of two things, either that you are God and came down from Heaven to do these things, or are the Son of God for doing these things. For this reason I write to beg you to hasten to me and to heal the suffering which I have ...”

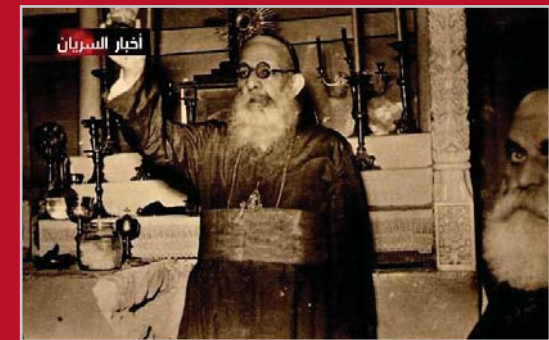
The reply from the Lord Jesus to King Abgar, according to the same tradition, was carried by a certain Ananias and read:

“Blessed are you who believed in me, not having seen me ... Now concerning what you wrote to me, to come to you, I must first complete here all for which I was sent, and after thus completing it be taken up to Him who sent me; and when I have been taken up, I will send to you one of my disciples to heal your suffering and give life to you and those with you. “

The story continues to describe how one of the Seventy Disciples, named Adai, was sent to King Abgar to heal his disease.

Historical literary sources tell us that by the second half of the second century there was an established church in Edessa, though probably most of the inhabitants remained pagan. The *Chronicle of Edessa* tells us that

in the year 201 AD, a disastrous flood destroyed the church of the Christians in the city. However, it took only about a century until most of the city was under the umbrella of Christianity. Edessa, home of the Syriac form of Aramaic, indeed prides itself as the first kingdom that officially accepted the new faith of Christ.



• The Syriac Church blessed by the Belt of Holy Virgin Mary:

According to the tradition of the Apostolic Church, it is written in our history that when the Apostles and the disciples carried the body of Virgin Mary to Gethsemane where they entombed her, three days after her death, the Angels came and carried her body to heaven. In those moments St. Thomas arrived in Jerusalem from India where he was preaching, saw the heavenly procession and the bewildering seen of the Virgin Mary with angels. He hesitated and was confused. He then asked her for a sign, and he saw the girdle (belt) of the Virgin Mary coming down from above and falling into his hands. He took the girdle with him to India where he blessed the faithful with it.