

The origin of the Aramean eagle

By: David Dag 31st may 2013



Many of us have wondered where the red and yellow flag has gotten its eagle symbol from. And everyone is telling a variety of versions and theories on this subject. I want to shed some light on where it comes from. I will also filter away facts from myths and lies.

Where does it come from?

The flag is based on an eagle-symbol known as a "winged sun-disk". This in turn is hold up or lifted up by three mystical unknown figures whose names are not mentioned in any inscription on the stele itself since there is nothing written on it to confirm their identities. The stele is housed today in the national museum of Aleppo (Halab) in Syria. These and other archeological finds were unearthed by the German archeologist Max Von Oppenheim and his team during their excavations at Tell Halaf (ancient Gozana outside Hassake in Syria) his other finds from the same site are housed in the same museum but also housed at the Pergammon museum in Berlin in Germany. Some have erroneously claimed that it was the French Andre Dupont Sommer who excavated Gozana but this is not true. He is though the author of the book *Les Arameens* in French, this book in turn was translated into Swedish with the title *Arameerna* by Gabriel Marawge (the former chairman of the Syriac Universal Alliance, SUA today known as the World Council of Arameans [Syriacs]) It's also available in Arabic as *Al-Aramiyun*.

Anyhow the stele was discovered or rather unearthed in 1911 in the palace of the Aramean king Kapara's palace, who ruled somewhere between the 10th or 9th century BCE. (According to William Foxwell Albright ca 950-875 BCE).



The original from Kaparas palace in Gozana (modern Tell Halaf)

Gozana was the ancient capital of the Aramean kingdom of Bit Bahiani that is mentioned in ancient cuneiform tablets by the ancient Assyrians. Bit Bahiani was independent Aramean citystate or kingdom somewhere in the Mesopotamian part of modern Syria between 1200-808 BCE. In 894 BCE the Assyrian king Adad-Nirari II mentions it in his archive as Aramean who pays tribute to the Assyrian Empire. Somewhere between 808/810 – 706 BCE Gozana and other cities and villages in Bit Bahiani were conquered by the ancient Assyrians and annexed to the empire.

Although Kapara's palace and steles' architecture and art were Neo-Hittite, Kapara was in fact an Aramean as attested by the ancient Assyrians. And because he was an Aramean and the stele was excavated in an Aramean king's palace, the modern Arameans (Syriacs) chose the sunwinged disk as a national symbol since the end of the 1970s until today.

I would like to add that there exist Aramean organizations and institutions around the world that use the original form of the winged sundisk with the sun instead of the flame.

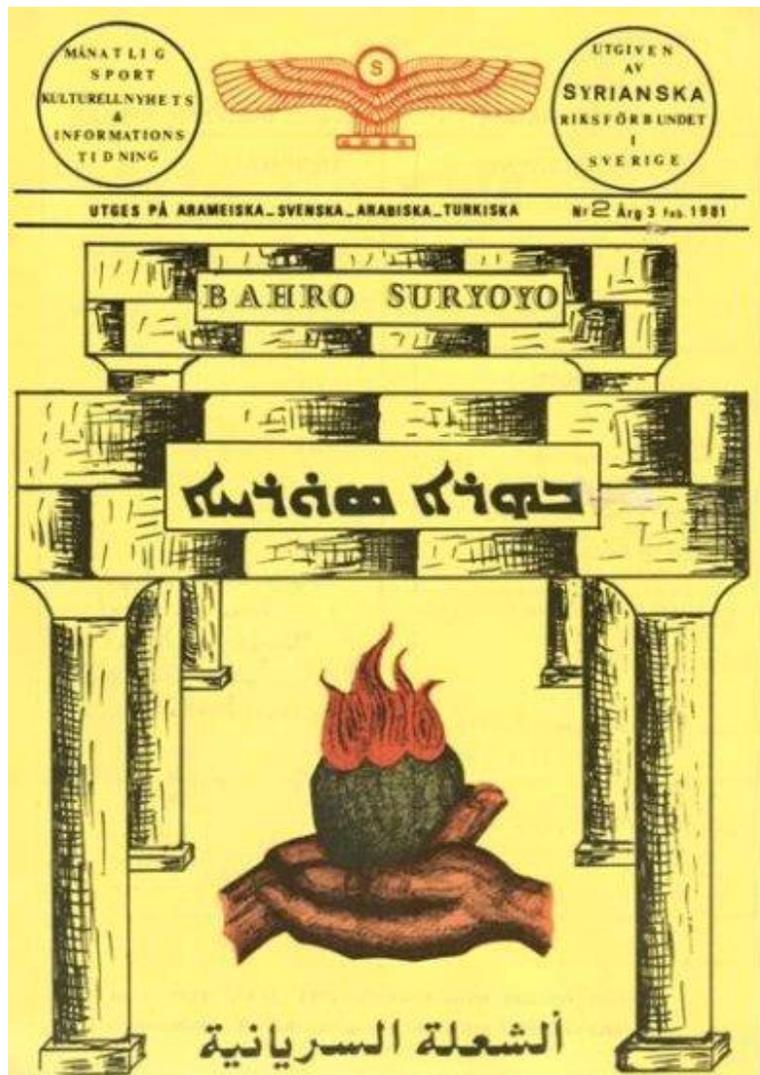
These are amongst others:

- Aramean Democratic Organization (ArDO) Sweden
- Aramean Democratic Organization (ArDO) Lebanon
- Aramean Movement for Human Rights (ABM) Netherlands
- Aramean Youth Union of Germany
- Aramean Liberal Organization

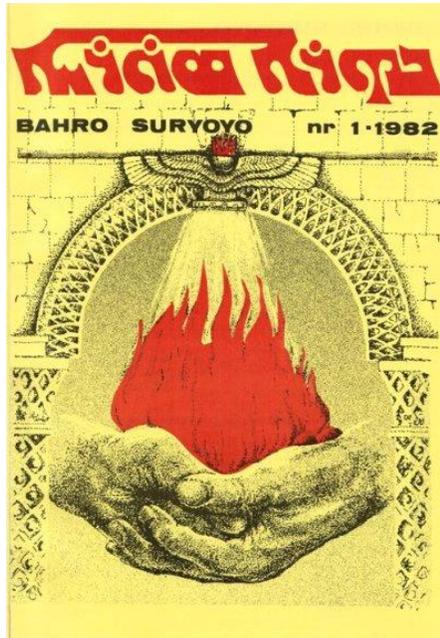
See here below:

Modern modifications of the symbol

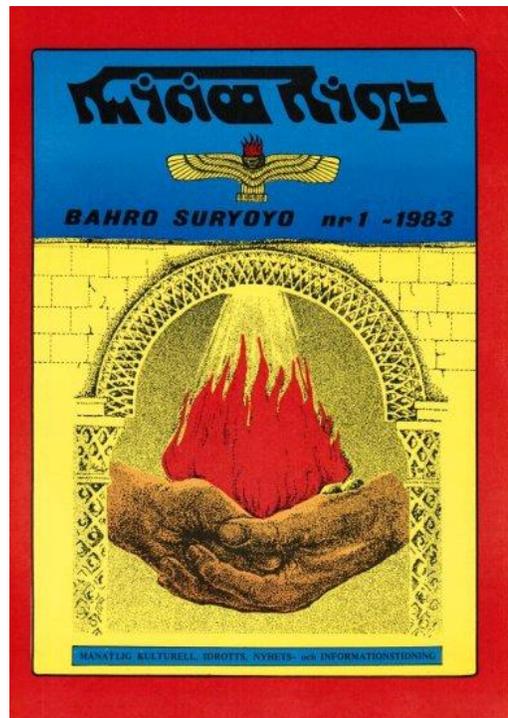




The eagle's head is round in this example of the Sweden based Bahro Suryoyo magazine from 1981. One can see at the upper part of the Aramean (Syriac) magazine, that the head of the eagle is circular just as the one on the original on the Aramean stele from ancient Gozana, but has the letter S in the middle of the sun that stands for Suryoyo.



Bahro Suryoyo 1982



Bahro Suryoyo 1983

Later on the editorial board of *Bahro Suryoyo* made another modification as could be seen in the first edition from 1982 when they replaced the sun with a burning torch and also on the 1983 edition.

Where did the idea to replace the sun with a burning torch come from?

The Syriac Federation boards of Sweden were the ones who decided to modify the eagle by changing the sun with a burning torch.

The flag in its last and present day developed state

On the modern red and yellow flag with the eagle, the lower half of the sun was left while the upper part is a flame or it's the same as the one mentioned above. It's only that the torch and flame are covered in the same yellow color to make it more united with the rest of the eagle.



The legs and feet of the original have been removed compared to the one from the ancient stele. The tail feathers have also been reduced from 8 to 5 on the modern eagle on the flag.

The modern flag exists in a small variety when it comes to the lower part of the eagle where the four flowers were originally depicted on the relief stele. The Modern flag consists of four stars with holes in the middle of them and sometimes it's depicted with dots instead that are supposed to be in the shape of stars. Regardless of what they are, their meaning is speculated without any sources to go on and therefore it's impossible to know their original meaning.

As for the yellow and red colors, the red color is said to symbolize the blood of our martyrs throughout our history while the yellow color symbolized the hope for our future. There is in fact another reason as to why these two colors were chosen for the modern flag to begin with. That reason is that they were taken from the colors of the Syriac Orthodox Church flag that is used by the patriarchate since at least the 1940s if not earlier.

Assyrianists hijacked the red and yellow colors from the Syriac Orthodox Church flag

Later on they were taken by the assyrianists in Syria during the 1950s and forward amongst others by Hazqiel Toros (who was an active member of the so called "*Kaldo-Ashur battalion*" also known as the 8th battalion during the French colonial protectorate period in Syria during the 1930s and 1940s. He used the colors in order to paint his painting of the Assyrian winged bull known as *Lammasu* in Akkadian cuneiform, where he painted the winged bull in red and his wings and crown in yellow. He also painted the Ashur symbol painting in Red and Yellow back then. They had these in their battalion office.



Ironically during Augin Kurts pan-Assyrian lecture in Gothenburg in Sweden, he claimed - *with exaggeration without any knowledge in Assyrian Akkadian cuneiform to confirm it* - that the ancient Assyrians used the same colors to paint their winged bulls and went as far as to claim that since the Nestorians have song lyrics in their spoken (North)eastern Neo-Aramaic *Suret(h)* (where they mention these colors), he went on to say *“this proves that, we have used these two colors since our Assyrian imperial past”* without any evidence to prove it. He also claimed that *“our spiritual leaders today just as the pagan priests of the ancient Assyrians use the same colors during our Church liturgy and the pagan temples on their robes or the Assyrian kings clothing”*, which is not even proven by him during his lecture, but is taken out of the thin air.

In fact our priests, bishops etc have their robes in different colors not only in red and yellow (or gold). As for the songs in *Sureth*, they were written in modern times and not written in the Assyrian Imperial past. So they don't prove anything. As for the winged bull, those in the museums and the ones in Iraq are not even painted, so this doesn't prove anything. The reason why the Assyrian movement chose the red and yellow colors for their symbols during the mid 1900s and especially during the 1970s, was a strategy to assyrianize our entire people regardless of church-denomination.

As for the modern Assyrian flag, it was designed by a certain George Bit Atanus from Teheran in Iran who lived in America in 1974. His inspiration was not taken from an Assyrian archeological find but rather from a Babylonian find from the Late Babylonian period, namely from the time of king Nabu-Apla-Iddina during the 9th century BC. The find was a relief stele known as the [“Tablet of Shamash”](#) excavated in Sippar in southern Iraq depicting the pagan sun god Shamash (who was worshipped by many ancient ethnic groups in antiquity such as the Amorites, ancient Assyrians, Arameans etc), This inscription below proves that the Arameans worshipped Shamash as well, especially in Hamath (Modern Hama in Syria) far away from Mesopotamia: The inscription in Old Aramaic says

*[Who]ever removes th[at which was (accomplished) by the hands of] Zakkur, king of Hama[th and Lu'ash] from the stele, and who[ever re]moves this stele from [befo]re Ilu-wer and carries it off fr[om] its [place], or whoever casts [it] in [. . .]. May Baal-shamayin and Ilu-[wer], and **Shamash** and Sahar, [...] and the gods of heav[en and the gods of earth, and Baal[. . .] the man and [. . .] the name of Zakkur and the name of [. . .]*

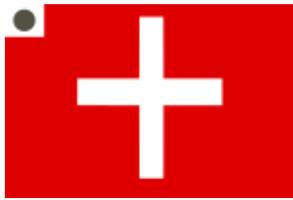
(Scott B. Noegel - "The Zakkur Inscription."
First Published in: Mark W. Chavalas, ed.
The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation
London: Blackwell (2006), 307-311.)

For more info on the history of the modern Assyrian flag read [“The Origins and Description of the Assyrian Flag”](#) by Homer Ashurian, History & Cultural Director, and member of AUA back then..

Before the modern Assyrian flag was designed and became official amongst assyrianists in 1974 until modern times, they used these flags below.

Prior to World War I, the Assyrian movements' flag consisted of 3 layers of salmon, white, and red. On the top left of the first layer, 3 white stars represented the three main Churches of the namely Church of the East (Nestorian church), Chaldean Catholic Church, and Syriac Orthodox Church. This flag was used during delegation meetings with Assyrian minded politicians and Western powers during and during post-World War I period. The flag was used until the current design was established. The flag was created by Assyrian minded Syriac Orthodox persons from the community of Tur Abdin.

Between 1915 and 1923, the East-Syriac Nestorian militia used a flag that resembled the modern flag of Switzerland but whose influence was rather that of the flag England inverted (not that of Great Britain). It consisted of a red background, indicating the blood spilled by the Nestorians prior to and during World War I, and a white cross. The top left corner contained a round seal, which was Agha Petros's personal stamp. The seal had his name on it in two languages (Eastern Neo-Aramaic Sureth and Russian). Agha Patros was an assyrianist from Hakkari in Eastern Turkey during Seyfo).



Flag of the Church of the East (1913-1923)



Flag used by the Assyrian American Federation prior to 1975 and was later abandoned for the modern Assyrian one

Name change: SUA to WCA

Since 1983, the Syriac Federation of Sweden (*Syrianska Riksförbundet, SRF*), took the initiative to find a worldwide umbrella organization for the Aramean (Syriac) people, namely the Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA), the modern Aramean (Syriac) flag was in turn used officially by our people who identified with the Aramean (Syriac) name.

Our worldwide global umbrella organization decided to change the name of the *Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA)* in English to *World Council of Arameans [Syriacs] (WCA)*

The new name was officially launched during the 1st Aramean Congress in Gutersloh in Germany that took place between 22nd and 23rd October 2011. Although the decision itself was proposed during June 2011 the WCA chairman Johny Messo mentioned that the name was changed in English only and that it would still remain the same in Aramaic, Arabic and Turkish, namely as *Huyodo Suryoyo Tibeloyo* (Aramaic), *Ittihad as-Suryani al-'Alami* (Arabic), *Dünya Süryaniler Birliği* (Turkish).

For more info about the name-change: <http://www.wca-ngo.org/about-us/name-change-sua-wca>

The origin of the winged sun-disk in different ancient cultures

The most reasonable source of the depictions of winged sun-disks in different ancient cultures is believed to be solar eclipses, as the one above but also sunsets.



Solar eclipse



Sunset

In pagan times the celestial bodies such as stars, sun, moon and planets etc has caught the interest and the fascination of the ancient peoples to a degree that they might have taken solar-eclipses and sunsets to be a sort of pagan times divine revelations or as a divine being appearing in the sky and this in turn made them depict them in different ways as winged sun-disks in their different shapes and styles within their respective ancient monuments and relics.

Many different ancient cultures have depicted a winged sun-disk. But they are depicted in many different ways among different ethnic groups of peoples in antiquity such as Arameans, Egyptians, Sumerians, ancient Assyrians, Luwians etc.

It's only the untrained eye and wishful thinking that cannot see the difference between this symbol below and the ancient Ashur symbol also known as the winged sun-disk of Ashur, who was the primary deity of the ancient Assyrians.

The only deity, who is close to it, is the ancient Persian Ahura Mazda symbol, if not a pure plagiarism of the ancient

Assyrian one. This is not the case with the Aramean one from Kaparas palace in Gozana, it is far from the Ashur symbol and the Ahura Mazda symbol in style as well as appearance

Compare the pictures below



Aramean, Gozana (Tell Halaf)

This one above is not even anywhere close to the Persians and Assyrian depictions. For example the wings and tail feathers completely different between this one and the Persian and Assyrian respectively. In other words the depiction of this one origin is not to be found in the Assyrian Ashur symbol.

I would also like to add that the Assyrian Ashur-symbol does not even depict the four flowers in contrast to the Aramean one from Gozana above. The meaning of those four flowers is unknown since the stele doesn't have any inscription to explain their meaning nor the meaning of the eagle itself.



Assyrian, Ashur-symbol



Ahura Mazda-symbol, Achaemenian Persian, from the trilingual Elamite-Babylonian Akkadian-Old Persian cuneiform Behistun inscription monument in Iran



Sumerian



Egyptian

There was another winged sun disc excavated in Til Barsip in Syria that looks similar to the one excavated in Gozana (Tell Halaf)



Even though this picture from a lecture in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem mentions Til Barsip as Luwian scholars also mention Arameans in Til Barsips' history in antiquity.



Aramean from Sam'al, in Bit Ya'di modern Zencirli (Turkey)



Bronzerelief aus dem Heraion von Samos. Inv. B. 2479

Booty taken by Hazael king of Aram-Damascus, but discovered in a temple on the Greek island of Samos

Does the winged sun-disc stele from Gozana depict Gilgamesh, Humbaba and Enkidu?

Many books, articles and websites in English and Arabic have written that the Aramean winged sun-disc stele from Gozana , depicts Gilgamesh, Humbaba and Enkidu from the Epic of Gilgamesh from the Sumerian mythology that was later inherited by the ancient Akkadians, Babylonian people(s) , ancient Assyrians etc. (Note that the term Babylonians was coined by the ancient Greeks and was not used by the indigenous inhabitants of Babel (Babylon) and its vicinity). Some have even written that it is an Assyrian symbol and Assyrian art (*fan al-Ashuri* in Arabic) in some books, misleading their readers and themselves.

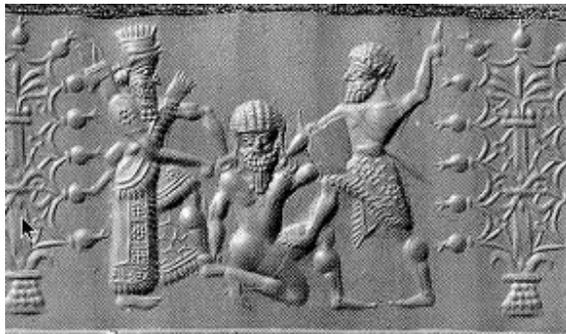
I would say that, those who have written so have done so only by speculation and have no evidence whatsoever to prove it. Since there is no inscription accompanied with it to prove it. Second of all, even if it were them, then there is one criterion that must be fulfilled. Everyone who is familiar with the Epic of Gilgamesh knows that Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaughtered Humbaba and that is how all three are depicted in cylinder seals, ancient reliefs etc.

Since they are not fighting on that stele and can therefore not be them on the other hand there was another stele excavated in Gozana depicting what is said to be them. Since they have compared this one below with other ones, such as the two other ones below this picture from Assyria or ancient Kiengir, which is the *endonym* for whom the Akkadians called Sumerians.



Gilgamesh and Enkidu's battle with Humbaba.

Aramean art from Gozana probably Gilgamesh Humbaba and Enkidu



For more info watch these lectures on YouTube [Israel, Aram & Assyria Between Bible & Archaeology – Hebrew University in Jerusalem](#)

Conclusion

We as Arameans (Syriacs) of the 20th and 21st century chose this winged-sun disk as a symbol for a flag for our people only because it was excavated at the palace of an ancient Aramean king. . Even if , hypothetically speaking the three mystical and mythical figures holding it were Gilgamesh, Humbaba and Enkidu, doesn't matter and isn't important in our case nor does it make us into Assyrians if it were them either. The ancient Arameans might have even worshipped this pagan symbol as a deity but the present day Arameans are Christians and didn't choose it in order to revive paganism but revived it for nationalistic purpose of creating a flag for our people.

As I have demonstrated above, many different cultures and civilizations throughout history have depicted winged sun-discs but this doesn't make Persians or the Egyptians etc into Assyrians. So trying to claim that our people are Assyrians based on that the winged sun-disc of the modern Aramean (Syriac) flag looks like or is Ashur is farfetched and low. Since our forefathers before us testified to their Aramean identity in our entire corpus of literature.



The Assyrianists are after all trying with different kinds of strategies to assyrianize the Aramean (Syriac) people by claiming that they have books and articles that says that this winged sun-disc is Ashur based on wishful thing and speculations only. This is one of many tricks they have up they sleeves. And those of us who cannot argue against them will surely fall for their arguments. A historians task is to find out the truth as good as he or she can. And the truth is all that is needed here.