



Established 1964  
Dedicated to the  
Advancement of Education  
of Assyrians



# NINEVEH

FIRST/SECOND QUARTER 1992

VOLUME 15 NO. 1 & 2



*Pope John Paul II meets with Mar Denkha IV, the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East (to the right of the Pope), and Mar Bawai Soro, Bishop of the Western United States. To the left of the Pope stands Bishop Pierre Duprey, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.*

CULTURAL — EDUCATIONAL — SOCIAL

# NINEVEH

FIRST/SECOND QUARTER 1992

VOLUME 15 NO. 1 & 2

Julius N. Shabbas ..... Editor  
Joel J. Elias ..... Ass't. Editor  
Peggie J. Hernandez ..... Circulation

## POLICY

ARTICLES SUBMITTED FOR PUBLICATION WILL BE SELECTED BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF ON THE BASIS OF THEIR RELATIVE MERIT TO THE ASSYRIAN LITERATURE, HISTORY, AND CURRENT EVENTS.

OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS MAGAZINE ARE THOSE OF THE RESPECTIVE AUTHORS AND NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF NINEVEH.

ASSYRIAN FOUNDATION OF AMERICA ESTABLISHED IN JUNE 1954 AND INCORPORATED IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA AS A NON-PROFIT, TAX EXEMPT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF EDUCATION OF ASSYRIANS.

## ADDRESS LETTERS TO

THE EDITOR  
NINEVEH  
P.O. BOX 2620  
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94702

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

U.S.A. & CANADA ..... \$15.00  
OVERSEAS ..... \$25.00

## ADVERTISEMENT RATES

	One Issue	Four Issues
FULL PAGE	\$50.00	\$45.00 ea.
HALF PAGE	35.00	30.00 ea.
ONE-QUARTER PAGE	25.00	20.00 ea.

## Assyrian Periodicals

We urge our readers to read and support the Assyrian publications. The active participation of all Assyrians is the only guarantee of the success of Assyrian periodicals.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Julius:

Youel A. Baaba's article entitled "Mishael Lazar Essa" published in the 4th Quarter 1991 issue of *Nineveh* was of special interest to me! It not only contained the history of the Assyrian literature in a nutshell but also touched, even though briefly, on the life and work of a prolific contemporary Assyrian man of letters I knew and some of whose writings I've read.

I also wish to thank you and the Foundation for the complimentary copies of newly-published Assyrian books you've been sending me. They have helped in reviving my dormant interest in Assyrian literature!

Of particular interest are the books published by Youel A. Baaba. They are beautiful specimens! The print is pretty and very readable and the books are well arranged, edited and bound, particularly the hard-bound uniform volumes of Eshaya Khinno's and of Mishael Essa's collections. The plain dark blue and dark red covers with embossed gold print on the front covers make them attractive library volumes. And their pages are overflowing with enjoyable reading! Although I've read some of Mishael's stories many years ago, I'm rediscovering him now and savoring the flavor of his juicy literary fruit!

Youel Baaba is doing good work by his initiative and individual effort in printing, reprinting, publishing and distributing the works, in Assyrian language, of noted modern Assyrian writers and poets and which otherwise might remain dead and forgotten! Even if his aim may be partly to build up and leave behind an Assyrian library in his own name as a legacy to his Assyrian nation, I'm sure his basic motive stems from his love and concern for his mother tongue and race.

I understand that Youel is using his own personal resources for his publishing project. At this time when there is, unfortunately, very limited readership for the Assyrian language to give him enough encouragement and support, his is a bold undertaking, for it's not only a non-profit venture but it could also very well mean a financially losing proposition to him!

Mikhael K. Pius  
Modesto, CA

Dear Mr. Shabbas:

Enclosed is my annual subscription for 1992 towards this excellent Assyrian publication.

Rowena d'Mar Shimun  
Burlingame, CA

Dear Mr. Shabbas:

I recently read in the last issue of *Nineveh*, Vol. 14 No. 4 for the 4th Quarter 1991, an article about ZOWAA, written by Mr. Youel A. Baaba, which I found to be the most interesting one considering the miserable conditions of our Assyrian people at the present time, in the northern part of our country.

Therefore, I would appreciate it if you would publish my following thoughts on the subject.

First of all, I would like to commend Mr. Baaba for this article wherein he has splendidly demonstrated ZOWAA's efforts for securing Assyrian rights in their forefathers' homeland, Bet Nahrain, based on the explanations made by Mr. Yacoub Yousif, ZOWAA's representative, during his visit to the USA.

On the relationship between the Kurds and the Assyrians in the northern part of Iraq, the writer has made it clear for the readers when he indicated:

"On two other occasions Mr. Talabani (the Kurdish leader) stated that he recognizes Assyrians as a separate nationality entitled to the same rights and privileges as all other minorities in Iraq. He stated that he recognizes the Assyrian Democratic Movement as the sole official representative party of the Assyrians in Iraq."

I think it is time now that all conscientious Assyrians whether organizations or individuals should diligently support the Assyrian Democratic Movement whose gallant members have committed themselves to the noble cause of their people, and are still untiringly devoting their lives in the Northern part of our country to safeguard our entity.

Because of this commitment, and being the only Assyrian party recognized by the Opposition Front of Iraq, hence the importance of its support.

In the past, we have lost many significant opportunities; let us learn a lesson NOT to lose this one. Let us put our differences (if any) aside, and just give a helping hand to this party (ZOWAA) which is led by our brilliant brothers, to name a few, Dr. Lincoln Malik and Mr. Yacoub Yousif.

Since ZOWAA's brave guards have devoted themselves to their peoples' sacred cause, then we as patriotic Assyrians should too, make a pledge to firmly support these faithful guards by our donations. Any donation, especially a monthly one, no matter how small the amount may be, will not only inspire the spirit of these militants, but would further encourage them to insistently keep the hope of attaining the goals of our people alive within our souls.

Shall my Assyrian brothers and sisters live up to their pledge and make the dream we have been waiting for for generations come true? . . . let us see!

Yours in Assyrianism,

Oraham G. Yacoub  
Elk Grove Village, IL

Dear Editor:

The enclosed money order is my contribution of \$25.00 towards *Nineveh* and \$75.00 towards the needy Assyrians.

Shemon E. Benjamin  
British Columbia, Canada

Dear Julius:

Enclosed please find a \$100.00 contribution to the needy Assyrians. Your magazine is very popular in our house, so popular that I have to make sure nobody walks away with it.

Please be kind enough to include the following names in your wonderful magazine's mailing list as a gift from me: Layla Woodruff, Mrs. Najeeba Abraham and Mr. & Mrs. S. Kambar.

Thank you for a job well done.

Blandina Dutra  
Benicia, CA

Dear Mr. Shabbas:

Enclosed please find a check for \$15.00 for my subscription to *Nineveh* magazine for the year 1992.

I am delighted to have it and I am very grateful to you all.

Sandra B. Petros  
Northridge, CA

Dear Mr. Shabbas:

Thank you very much for mailing me your informative magazine *Nineveh*, which is quite interesting to read and to know how our Assyrian people are living and labouring beyond our own borders. It is also reminiscent of some of our relatives, friends and acquaintances living in other countries of the world.

While reading the latest issue of *Nineveh*, my wife and I came across an article on page 19 regarding a young lady, Famera Khaya, and she seems to be related to us.

It is my pleasure to enclose for your further interest a copy of a church flyer we are now circulating among our Assyrian population in Canada, about an important series of messages I am planning to deliver this coming Sunday, February 2, regarding the past, present and future destiny of our Assyrian people in our own evangelical chapel.

The messages will be taped for use by any interested parties. I am hoping and praying that I may be able to continue this special series in the United States for our Assyrian people during this coming summer.

Rev. Robert (Baba) Jacob  
Rexdale, Ont., Canada  
Assyrian Evangelical Community  
Church

Dear Mr. Shabbas:

It pleases me to inform you that I am receiving the *Nineveh* magazine regularly and would like to thank you for the efforts exerted by you to furnish your readers with valuable articles and news about our Assyrian people via this popular magazine.

My check for \$30.00 for renewal of my subscription is enclosed.

Oraham G. Yacoub  
Elk Grove Village, IL

Dear Editor:

Please enter my subscription for *Nineveh* magazine. Enclosed please find a check for \$15.00 for a one year subscription.

Roussana Bet Lazar  
New York, NY

Dear Mr. Shabbas:

Enclosed you will find a \$100.00 donation to the Assyrian Foundation's project for helping the needy Assyrians.

Your recent issue of *Nineveh* brought back some memories and tears. Rarely have I seen any photos and articles about the Assyrian immigration from northern Bet-Nahrain and their settlement in Syria in the mid-thirties.

It'll be refreshing to read more about the over 100,000 Assyrians currently living in "Syria" who are very active in Assyrian organizations and national causes.

Andrew Bet-Shlimon  
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Dear Mr. Shabbas:

I'm really so proud to receive *Nineveh* magazine regularly, and I thank you for the very precious work toward the Assyrian nation all over the world.

Attached herewith please find my check in the amount of \$50.00 to cover my subscription.

Thank you, and I wish you great success.

Nina Johny Betseen  
North Hollywood, CA

Dear Julius:

I am pleased to enclose herein a check for \$100.00 for subscriptions to *Nineveh* magazine for myself and also for each of the two persons named, Mrs. Emama Cannon and Mrs. Easter Malik.

I enjoy reading the magazine and congratulate you for a job well done and wish you continuous success.

William K. Kanon  
Modesto, CA

Dear Julius:

Thank you sincerely for the two recent complimentary copies of your lovely magazine (Vol. 14, Nos. 3 and 4) which we thoroughly enjoyed reading. The periodical is very interesting, informative and indeed educational. Well done, and may God help you and your colleagues as well as the writers to continue the splendid work you are doing.

I am pleased to forward herewith the sum of \$150.00, \$50.00 to represent two years' subscriptions ('91 and '92), and the balance of \$100.00 as a small contribution to your Foundation. For '91 you have already sent us issues 3 and 4 of *Nineveh* and we would appreciate it if you could send us copies of Nos. 1 and 2 to complete that year.

With kindest regards and best wishes,

Ashur Gamliel Shliemon  
Cheam, Surrey, England

Dear Julius:

We enjoy reading your magazine and are proud of our culture and history, and we love to pass them to our children Ramsen, Sabrina, and Shanna.

Enclosed you will find a check for \$20.00 to cover a subscription for Mr. Shimshon Lazar Essa, Modesto, CA. This is a present from his loving grandchildren. Would you please include the recent edition of 4th Quarter 1991, Vol. 14 No. 4.

Our best wishes to you and all the members of your family and the *Nineveh* team.

Ashur and Ramina Sargon  
Morton Grove, IL

Dear Editor:

I have read your magazine, *Nineveh*, at the home of some of my friends and I really enjoyed what it has to offer. Enclosed is my check for a full year's subscription. Thank you.

Anna P. Youhana  
Turlock, CA

Dear Editor:

I recently received my first edition of *Nineveh* magazine which I enjoyed immensely. I, therefore, enclose \$25.00 for a subscription for my sister, Mrs. Mariana Yadgar, who lives in England.

Roussana Bet Lazar  
New York, NY

Dear Editor:

Enclosed is a check for \$15.00 for a subscription to your great magazine. Thanks.

Jeffrey & Beneta (nee Baitoo) A.  
Riolo  
San Diego, CA

Dear Mr. Shabbas:

We do consider *Nineveh* as one of the preeminent and most shining Assyrian magazines. We would like to extend to you our appreciation for the efforts exerted and the services done through your magazine to the Assyrians all over the world.

However, we would like to express a particular interest in some articles that appeared in your magazine revolving around some active Assyrian individuals such as: Prof. Lilli Oraham Teymourazi, Raabi Koorish Y. Shlemon . . . and others. The articles appeared in the East Assyrian language. We wonder if it is possible for you to republish such important articles in English to facilitate their accessibility to as many Assyrian youths as possible.

Jan Diyarbakërlî  
Editor of *Nsibin*, Sweden

*Editor's Note: Your idea as expressed above is very good. From time to time we have translated some articles into English. It is very time consuming, but we will do our best in the future. We are glad to note that the editor of Nsibin has translated into Turkish some articles from the English section of Nineveh magazine and inserted them in Nsibin. We encourage that.*

Dear Julius:

Enclosed please find a check for \$50.00, \$15.00 for a subscription to *Nineveh* magazine and \$35.00 for the Foundation's Education Fund. Keep up the excellent work the Foundation is doing. God bless you all.

Shlimoon Youkhana  
Chicago, IL

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## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

We will be publishing an article in the coming issues of *Nineveh* on Habbaniya sports and sportsmen, and Habbaniya social and cultural life. If you have relevant good vintage photos and/or information of interest, please mail it to the Editor.

We will be happy to consider all **suitable** material received for publication, and safely return the photos to owners after publication.

# Against All Odds: The Assyrian Church

*by Brother David Carroll, FSC, Ph.D.*

Last November, Father James Moynihan and I attended the 25th anniversary of a parish in Yonkers, NY. As with any church function, many families had taken tables for the festival and others brought trays of steaming food while the band tuned its instruments and tested the loud speakers.

Typical in some ways, but in other ways this celebration was quite different. Once the speeches ended and the music began, I was transported back to the seventh century B.C. when the paths of the Assyrians, the inhabitants of ancient Babylon and Nineveh, crossed those of the Israelites. The parishioners are members of Mar Mari parish of the

Assyrian Church of the East — “Nestorians” we used to call them.

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## The 20th century all but destroyed Assyrian Christianity.

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Before the dancing began, Mar Aprim, the community’s bishop — (Mar means “one who is sent” in Aramaic) — spoke to the congregation about their patron, who in Assyrian tradition was one of the 72 disciples referred to in the Gospel of St. Luke



*Pope John Paul II meets with Mar Denkha IV, the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East (to the right of the Pope), and Mar Bawai Soro, Bishop of the Western United States. To the left of the Pope stands Bishop Pierre Duprey, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.*

(Chapter 10). Mar Aprim spoke of how their parish church contained a stone from one of the ancient, now destroyed, churches of the early East Syrian church; a body that flowered in the Persian Empire (modern Iran and Iraq).

Modern scholarship reveals that by the middle of the second century, A.D., the Assyrian Church developed directly from the Judeo-Christian Church of Jerusalem. The tensions of war between the Byzantine and Persian Empires in the fourth century led the Assyrians to adopt a christology that varied from both Rome and Constantinople. The Assyrians also asserted their independence from the bishop of Rome and the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople (*See CNE, Jan., 1991, "Right of Rites"*).

Isolated from the churches in the West, and a minority in the Zoroastrian Persian Empire, the Assyrian Church focused its missionary endeavors in the East.

Archeological evidence cites the presence of Assyrian missionaries in China, Mongolia and Tibet. Malabar and Malankara Christians in India credit these missionaries for the development of their church in the third and fourth centuries.

By 1318 A.D., more than 30 metropolitan sees (archdioceses) and 200 suffragan dioceses (local dioceses) constituted the Assyrian Church. These Christians were all but annihilated by the Mongol invaders in the 14th century. Two hundred years later, the once-mighty Assyrian Church was reduced to a handful of monasteries and village churches in what is now southeastern Turkey.

As I watched a communal dance in the church hall, a twisting affair alternately led by flag-waving men, women and children, these events were not as far removed as many would think.

The 20th century all but destroyed the Assyrians. During World War I, the Assyrian community, together with the Chaldeans, their Catholic counterparts, were suspected by the Turks of supporting the British war effort (*See CNE, Jan., 1991, "An Iraqi Catch 22"*). The Turks promptly slaughtered thousands of Assyrians and herded the rest into refugee camps. More than 50,000 died of cholera and malnutrition. The survivors were deported.

Those who could, fled to what is now Iraq, seeking a safe haven in the British-occupied territories. It was, however, a short-lived peace. In 1933, Iraq achieved independence and a clash between Assyrian and Iraqi troops led to yet another massacre and a further scattering of the Assyrian population. Many came to the United States, others sought refuge in Australia, India and Lebanon. Today, however, small communities can still be found in the ancient homeland — Iran, Iraq, Syria and in parts of the Islamic republics in the former Soviet Union.



*Mar Bawai bestows a blessing.*

Once again, war in the region has dramatically affected the remnants of this community. Last January, the forces of the Coalition initiated a military campaign to drive Iraq's forces from oil-rich Kuwait. In that brief but destructive war, the Coalition achieved its goal and drove Iraq from Kuwait. Iraq, however, was destroyed. The nation's electrical plants, water treatment facilities, roads, bridges and factories were destroyed. Malnutrition, cholera and other infectious diseases ravage millions of civilians.

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### **Assyrians are regarded as symbols of the west.**

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In northern Iraq, the Assyrian and Chaldean heartland, Christians were forced to flee their homes following the war. Many of the Kurdish refugees in Iran, Jordan and Turkey were really Christian.

Once a prosperous and well-educated minority, the Assyrian Christians are regarded as symbols of western colonialism, which some Muslim extremists regard as an exploitation of people and resources. At one time the rulers of the Middle East, the Assyrians now huddle as a remnant in refugee camps scattered throughout Iran, Jordan and Turkey.

Catholic Near East Welfare Association provided support for two of these camps in Turkey, while our "Iraqi pipeline" supplied much needed material to



*Mar Bawai Soro with Iraqi refugees in a Syrian refugee camp.*

24 clinics operated by Chaldean Catholic sisters in northern Iraq. In cooperation with the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, the Archdiocese of Osaka (Japan) and Catholic Relief Services, our Association provided food, medical care and basic assistance to thousands. As of this writing, though, the U.S. sponsored United Nations embargo has prevented regular shipments of supplies from entering Iraq. In a time of extraordinary suffering the Assyrians have turned to their fellow Christians for assistance.

Those who have emigrated to the United States have established congregations in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Texas and Washington. This "new world" community seeks to institute a seminary, reestablish monastic life and bear witness to the Gospel in exile.

Today, 20th century North Americans — the inhabitants of the new world — are confronting the remains of many communities lost in the pages of history. After centuries of isolation, persecution, corruption and reconciliation, the once-formidable Assyrian Church of the East has arrived in the West to reclaim its vitality and to take its part in the body of Christ.

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*Brother David Carroll, FSC, is the Catholic Near East Welfare Association's director of programs. This article appeared in Catholic Near East magazine January 1992, Vol. 18, No. 1.*

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## THE OPENING OF ASHURBANIPAL LIBRARY IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

The Assyrian Australian Association has announced that it is establishing the Ashurbanipal Library in Sydney, and will be officially opened to the public on April 1, 1992 (Assyrian New Year).

The purpose of this project is to preserve Assyrian language and heritage and to disseminate Assyrian literature and make it available to more people. They have requested that writers, publishers and individuals who wish to contribute books and other material to the library may do so by writing to the following address:

Ashurbanipal Library  
Assyrian Australian Association  
P.O. Box 101  
Fairfield NWS 2165  
Australia

## CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

*Nineveh* Fourth Quarter 1991, page. 58. Classes at Assyrian Nisibin School of the East, Sydney, Australia are held only on Saturdays from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and NOT every day as we reported.

In the same issue: His Holiness Mar Addai II is the Patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East, whose See (seat) is in Baghdad, Iraq.



# ASSYRIAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (ZOWAA)

By: *Youel A Baaba*

## *Introduction*

The real victims of the Gulf war were and continue to be the people of Iraq: Arabs, Kurds and Assyrians. This tragedy brought to the attention of the world the plight of Kurds and Assyrians who continue to be denied their basic human rights.

In recent months we have heard a great deal about the Assyrian Democratic Movement (Zowaa). The visit of Mr. Yacoub Yousif to the Assyrian communities in this country generated a positive response to his pleas for financial help.

Unfortunately, the Assyrian public knows very little about the Assyrian Democratic Movement. My objective here is to give a brief history of Zowaa, its ideology, objectives and what Assyrians in the United States can do to help their compatriots. It should be noted that this is not an official document of Zowaa, but represents my own research and observations.

## *Background*

As a result of the Simel massacre in 1933 and the subsequent exodus of almost 10,000 Assyrians from Iraq to temporary settlement in eastern Syria under French colonial rule, the Assyrian national movement suffered a big setback. A decade passed before the nation recovered from the debilitating massacre and new patriotic activities began to germinate once again among Assyrians.

The defeat of Rashid Ali Al-Gailani in the 1941 uprising against the Iraqi monarchy and the British military forces stationed in Iraq was indirectly encouraging for Assyrians. The active and determining role played by the Assyrian soldiers (Levies) under the British command in that conflict was psychologically uplifting.

As of then, Assyrians in the Middle East had yet to develop a political party commanding the support of a majority of the Assyrian public. Without a national political organization, leadership remained divided among religious leaders and a few maliks. The rivalry of various religious sects, fear of reprisals from oppressive regimes and residual hatred of the majority of the local population contributed heavily to the Assyrian failure to develop a national political party.

## *National Movements*

In the early forties two small Assyrian national movements emerged in Iraq and Iran. In Habbaniya, the British military base, "Khait Khait" was started by Ousta Moshe, an Assyrian who had had personal experience with the Armenian national movement in the Soviet Union. The "Khait Khait" movement modeled itself after the Armenian national movement. Ousta Moshe managed to attract a number of patriotic Assyrians; secretly they attempted to develop a political organization. The movement sought a broad-based support intended to enable the exiled Patriarch to champion the cause of his people. The concept was conveyed to Assyrians in Iran. However, after a few years, the new movement failed due to petty disputes among the original supporters. It should be noted that the movement was not intended to be anti-Iraq or anti anyone. It envisioned that post armistice day the rights of Assyrians would be recognized and an equitable solution would be found. The organizers' main objective was to have the new movement provide the catalyst for the creation of a national leadership to champion the Assyrian cause.

For many years, a number of Assyrians in Iraq have been politically active under the umbrella of other parties. The objective of most of these parties has been to change the existing government and to replace it with a more suitable one. The main motivation of Assyrians associated with these political parties has been to achieve a democratic Iraq, and it has been assumed that Assyrians would benefit from a representative government. They

had no specific plans to achieve special rights or privileges for Assyrians per se.

The Kurdish national movement has been another matter. Ever since the establishment of the government of Iraq (immediately after the First World War), the Kurds have sought either autonomy or independence. Kurdish demands have varied depending on the leader and the specific time. There are those who have demanded an autonomous state within the Iraqi structure, and others whose objective has been an independent Kurdistan.

Since the majority of Assyrian villages are situated in northern Iraq (where the Kurds make their claim), the Assyrians often find themselves participating in this struggle not by choice but due to geographical reality.

When the monarchy was eliminated in Iraq by Abdul Karim Kassim, Assyrians experienced more freedom and some limited recognition. Like the majority of the population, Assyrians were hopeful that the new republic would institute democratic reforms, establish equality and bring economic improvements to all the citizens of Iraq. However, the Kassim regime was brutally terminated and its promises did not materialize.

The Baath regime that replaced Kassim began on a positive note for the Assyrian minority. The Bakr government declaration that granted all Assyrian (Syriac) speaking people freedom to learn, teach and use their language was an encouraging beginning. Unfortunately, hopes were quickly dashed when the Assyrians were subjected to the policy of Arabization. In the 1977 national census, Assyrians were forced to register as either Arabs or Kurds, and were not recognized as a viable minority in Iraq. Other governmental policies were specifically directed against Assyrians such as forced demographic changes, demolition of villages and churches and falsification of Assyrian history.

In the early days of the Second World War, the British exiled Reza Shah to South Africa and installed his son as a puppet monarch. The first Shah had been anti-British and sympathetic to the Germans. This British move secured both the oil fields and the routes to transfer the military and economic aid granted to the

USSR by the Allies. While the Allies were busy supplying the USSR, Stalin's agents were feverishly building the Communist Party in Iran.

In Azerbaijan, the northern province of Iran, a number of Assyrians were attracted to the idea of an independent Azerbaijan. They believed that such a government, democratically-constituted, would recognize the rights of Assyrians in Urmia and would allow them to participate politically in the new independent nation. Both the number and the role of the Assyrians involved in the independence movement of Azerbaijan were very minor compared to the total population. However, when the Shah's forces (with military assistance from the United States) crushed the Azerbaijani movement, the entire Assyrian population in Urmia paid dearly for its minute role. Assyrian losses in lives and property were far out of proportion to their numbers participating in the independence movement. Once again Assyrian blood was used to quench the thirst of bigots.

### *Birth of Zowaa*

As a result of these actions and other facets of discrimination displayed by the ruling authorities, a new political party was established to secure Assyrian rights within Iraq. A founding conference was held on April 12, 1979, from which a new national movement emerged under the name the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ZOWAA). The movement has been recognized by other Iraqi opposition groups. When the U. S. State Department invited the Iraqi Kurdistan Front to Washington in September, 1991, Zowaa was one of the political parties included in that Front.

Zowaa has been accepted and supported by other Iraqi opposition parties and by European governments. Assyrian political parties in the United States need to accept Zowaa as the official party of Assyrians in Iraq and to provide it the financial assistance, and the political and moral support it deserves. Zowaa is ready to work with all Assyrian political parties genuinely supporting the struggle of Assyrians in Iraq to gain their human and national rights.

## **Zowaa's Ideology**

The following information is extracted from the Assyrian Democratic Movement Political Program. Per this document, the Assyrian Democratic Movement is conscious of the political history of Assyrians and of their tragic setbacks. In an effort to right this course, Zowaa is dedicated to a progressive national ideology aimed at:

- Elimination of all tribal, sectarian and regional attitudes among Assyrians.
- Linkage of democracy in Iraq with attainment of legitimate national rights of Assyrians
- Solidification of ties of national fraternity and common destiny between Assyrians and all other nationalities in Iraq.
- Elimination of anti-Assyrian policies practiced by the Iraqi government, such as ethnic genocide, forced demographic changes, Arabization, Baathization, demolition of villages, falsification of history, and the official denial of Assyrian national identity.
- Recognition of women's equal rights in the political, social and cultural spheres.
- Support the effort of Assyrians in diaspora to secure their national rights to preserve their language, culture, and heritage.
- Belief in the rights of nations to self-determination and support of the struggle of people for liberation from exploitation.
- Support for the United Nations principles of peaceful coexistence, resolution of international disputes through negotiations, prohibition of nuclear weapons and preservation of world peace.

## **Zowaa's Objectives**

The objective of the movement is to participate in the creation of a democratic

government of national unity that will guarantee the rights of all nationalities within Iraq. Specifically, the movement's objectives calls on the Iraqi government to:

- Recognize that the Assyrian nation is an indivisible constituent of the Iraqi people and confirm this recognition in the national constitution.
- Implement the democratic, administrative and cultural rights of the Assyrian people within Iraqi national unity.
- Include Assyrian representation in the central government and in regional self-rule assemblies in proportion to their population.

## **Assyrians and the Gulf War**

Following the Gulf war, when the central Iraqi government attacked the Kurdish uprising, Assyrians were among the victims of the tragedy. Thousands of people lost their homes and property and were driven out by fear of attacking forces into neighboring countries. Today there are still thousands of Assyrian deportees in Turkey, Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Zowaa's participation in this armed struggle was strictly for self-defense and an attempt to preserve the lives of many Assyrians from the calamities of the situation. The Iraqi government attack is a regrettable situation for the small Assyrian minority in Iraq. Zowaa is cognizant of the fact that Assyrians cannot afford to engage in military activities nor does it hope to secure their rights by force.

History has shown more than once that Assyrians cannot put their trust in others. We have been betrayed time and time again. The Assyrians should learn to work peacefully and in support of democratic forces to bring about changes without blood shed.

## **The Role of Assyrian Americans**

The greatest service that Assyrian organizations in the United States can render their compatriots in Iraq is to provide financial and political support to

their brothers and sisters who are desperately in need of such assistance. It is truly tragic to witness our national organizations consume their energy and resources in fighting each other for the self-proclaimed role of national leadership rather than unite and work for one common cause.

Each national organization has a significant role to play in this situation. The needs of our nation in Iraq are much greater than our capabilities; thus, there is room for all concerned Assyrians to participate and bring relief to our people. It is time that we all come together in a truly patriotic commitment dedicated to serve the needs of our nation. We invite all Assyrian organizations, churches and institutions to come forward with plans, ideas, and projects to accomplish our national duty to our people.

Assyrians in the United States cannot arrogate political leadership over their compatriots who are the victims of political upheaval in Iraq. Such leadership must come from the same people who are the victims of the turmoil. They and they alone can decide for themselves who will lead them. We in the United States can offer advise, develop political and financial support from the U.S. administration, and raise funds from Assyrians and other sympathetic groups.

### *Assyrian Aid Society of America*

Recognizing the urgency of needed help for our brothers and sisters first to survive the present tragedy and eventually to return and rebuild their homes and lives, the supporters of Zowaa in the United States have joined together to establish the Assyrian Aid Society of America. The primary objective of this society is and will continue to be the raising of funds and channeling them to assist needy Assyrians in the Middle East. This is an organization for all Assyrians who wish to support their compatriots on a regular and organized basis.

This is a non profit organization dedicated to the establishment of an *Assyrian National Fund* to help Assyrians. The aim is to organize fund raising on a systematic basis where all concerned Assyrians will contribute regularly and faithfully to the cause. In

the very near future, supporters of Zowaa all over the United States will open branch offices of this organization to provide the opportunity for Assyrians to participate as supporters of our brothers and sisters in our homeland.

It is important to note that this organization is not and will not affiliate with any other existing organization. It will not compete with or oppose any other Assyrian organization. It will cooperate and work with all Assyrian political parties and organizations in the areas of fund raising to provide aid to our people in the Middle East. Its membership is open to all people regardless of their national origin, country, political ideology, religious persuasion and present affiliation with any other organization. Its mission is very specific; namely, *raising funds to help Assyrians.*

We urge all Assyrians to come forward and show their generosity to assist our brothers and sisters in this their darkest hour. God bless you all.



SUPPORT OUR ASSYRIAN PEOPLE IN IRAQ

DONATE TO THE  
**ASSYRIAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT**

Make checks payable to:

**ASSYRIAN AID SOCIETY OF AMERICA**

41 Sutter Street, Suite 1534  
San Francisco, CA 94104

## CONGRATULATIONS

A boy, Alexander John Samo, was born on February 10, 1992 to Mariana (nee Shabbas) and Romeo Samo of Milpitas, California. Romeo and Mariana are members of the Assyrian Foundation.

ASU — meaning “sunrise, east” — was the early Assyrian name of the east coast of the Aegean Sea. It spread to cover the whole continent. And turned into the name Asia.

# THE PERSIAN GULF WAR AND ITS BITTER OUTCOME FOR THE UNKNOWN PARTICIPANTS

by P. Bet-Peeroo (Russia)

*Published in the Assyrian Magazine "ATRA" No. 3, 1991, Moscow. Translated from the Russian by Ilia Vartanov.*

Assyrians have lost . . . They have lost in one more war. Moreover, no one piece of the international Mass Media mentioned their involvement in the war. This has happened to us several times before during the 20th century, a century that has been so merciless to Assyrians. This is not the first time that Assyrians pay too high of a price, with their blood and land, for their detrimental political short-sightedness, for their inability to make the right friends!

History has always been merciless to weak nations . . . Note: today our "Kurdish brothers" in Baghdad hug Saddam Hussein, the Russian governmental television network televises events regularly in the camps of Kurdish refugees, who, by the way, do not seem to be in a hurry to get back to their homes. In addition to this, international society does not keep an eye on those citizens, i.e. Assyrians, whom the officials in Baghdad even refused to grant the right of identity as the Assyrian nation. Instead, Iraq chooses to identify the most ancient native population of the country as "Syriaque speaking Chaldeans, Surian, and . . . Assyrians" — a special term invented by officials. The last few centuries Assyrians have been expelled from their native lands, the lands that are today a subject of sharing and "trade dealing" in negotiations between "Baghdad's Satan" and his two major Kurdish opponents (i.e., Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and Mas'ud Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party).

It would be naive to believe, even for a minute, that the "remarkable trinity" — Saddam, Barzani, and Talabani — feel any sympathy towards the Assyrians. Each one of these men had managed (at one time or another) to play an "Assyrian card," and benefit from the well known Assyrian trustfulness and faithfulness. And there is little hope left for Assyrians, that they will be able to return, sometime, to their — as they say — "beloved Homeland of Bet-Nahrain" (i.e., the North of Iraq).

Descendants of ancient native inhabitants of "the Land of Two Rivers," who recently have been called "Syriacs — first Christians" in one leading Soviet newspaper — of course do prefer a comfortable life far away, somewhere in Australia, U.S.A., Canada, or Sweden. In this case, the West will gain very cheap labor, and Iraq will rid itself of the deviates — "bad buys" — Assyrians; and as to the Assyrians themselves, a mass emigration will cost them the loss of any significant hope of being in the homeland.

This, in turn, will make activities of various Assyrian organizations in the U.S.A., as well as in other western countries, senseless. In my opinion, this apparently happened to our people in today's U.S.A., where numerous Assyrian quasi-organizations, "parties" and their leaders, being thousands of miles away from their homeland, fight "heroically" for the rebirth of the Assyrian Nation and State.

What are Assyrian prospects for the nearest years and decades? Most likely, a deep spiritual depression, growing national nihilism, and a disbelief in our national power . . . These factors are to make an impression on the thinking part of the Assyrian people (the unthinking Assyrians will always be prosperous and pretty happy wherever they exist). This growing national crisis does threaten to destroy completely our ability to survive as a nation. This obvious national disaster will happen if we do not learn a lesson from our past and do not prepare ourselves to face the upcoming new circumstances as inevitable and unavoidable realities.

Here is a shaking statistic: just 25 years ago the overwhelming majority of Assyrians lived on our historic lands in the Middle East; even according to the official Iraqi statistics (that was always unfavourable to the Assyrian population) Christians accounted for 60% of all of the population of the First "Velayat" of Iraq, i.e., Nineveh-Mosul. Today this demographic situation has been replaced by the opposite one. For the first time during several centuries the majority of the Assyrian people have found themselves scattered all over the globe, in the various countries of the Christian West.

What's next? There, in "Galuta" (diaspora) Assyrians will experience, first, a partial assimilation, and then complete assimilation. This trend is growing quickly, and it will take 50 to 100 years for the process of assimilation to be completed. The only way to save our nation is to follow a certain constructive national idea, that would be powerful enough to unite all segments of the Assyrian people as a whole. This highest goal, this highest idea of rebirth of the Assyrian Christian State on its historic lands has been perceived by Arab leaders as an idea of creation of "the second Israel," and this frightens Arabs in the Middle East the most.

Today, it seems to be incredible and impossible to carry out that idea. Indeed, Assyrians have got one chance in 100, or one chance in 1,000, or even one chance in 1,000,000. At any rate, if it is our intention to save ourselves as a nation, we must use and

realize this one chance! Furthermore, it is completely our responsibility to realize this single national chance, and we should not count on someone's "unconditional" help or "brotherly" help. We have had enough in our bitter past! Now it is time to be, at last, a sober-minded people; it is time to design carefully our national long-term political game aimed to fulfill Assyrian vital projects either on our forefathers' lands or in "Galūta" — diaspora (i.e., countries of emigration).

The major objective of today's generation of Assyrians is, at least, to preserve the Assyrian people ethnically. The next generation will have to get rid of over-emotional behavior, become disciplined, and learn how to foresee events and react to them.

There's also a very important factor Assyrians must become aware of; they have to learn to say "farewell" in time to their political allies. Earlier, all our "friends" and "brothers" were the first to leave Assyrians to chance, once our allies' goals have been reached. So did, for example, Englishmen and Russians during and after World War I. The most recent case is related to Iraqi Kurds, whose purposes had apparently differed from ours in the early 1970s when the BA'ATH leadership of Iraq provided the Assyrian people with some "cultural rights" only.

At that time Assyrians made efforts to gain more than "cultural rights." They intended to get autonomy similar to that of the Kurdish people. Well known Assyrian leader Malik Yacob negotiated this issue in Baghdad in 1972. Talks could have been successful if Malik Yacob would accept the offer of Iraqi authorities to recreate Assyrian battalions (this idea goes back to the legendary Assyrian Levies . . .) so as to use Assyrian military units for protection of Iraqi boundaries.

Assyrian leaders refused to accept this offer. They preferred to go along with Kurdish politicians and to be faithful and generous towards their ally. The only visible result of Baghdad talks for Assyrians was Decree No. 201 "Of granting of cultural rights to Syriac speaking Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs," that was issued by the Revolutionary Command Council of Iraq on April 16, 1972.

After the military Kurdish troops leader Barzani restarted the struggle against the Baghdad central government in the mountains, all contacts and talks between Assyrians and the Iraqi government ceased.

In 1975, Iraqi troops that had received a huge supply of arms from the Soviet Union managed to defeat units of Kurdish "peshmargas" (i.e., warriors) in most areas. Meanwhile, the situation of their faithful friends, the Assyrians, had worsened. They became defenseless victims of the Iraqi government's policy of ethnocide, i.e., cultural genocide.

Having refused to cooperate with the central Iraqi government, and having missed a good oppor-

tunity, Assyrians gave up their own interests as well as their own independent role in Iraq's current political life. The Kurds did not even see that "generous gesture," nor did they appreciate it. Moreover, they did not — in the past nor in the present — promise the Assyrians anything more than that which had already been guaranteed to them by Baghdad.

Assyrians continue to struggle to the present in the mountains for the sake of the Kurdish cause, having been involved in the war that is senseless for them. Who knows, today's Assyrians, probably, are trying to liberate lands that are going to be occupied by the next generation of Kurds . . .

Needless to say that in the Middle East, as well as beyond this region, nobody is sympathetic to Assyrians. Therefore, there's nothing left for Assyrians except to set their hopes on the Lord and upon themselves. It is time to accept that simple truth that freedom (or lack of freedom) of Arabs, Kurds or of any other minority is not identical to the freedom (or lack of freedom) for Assyrians. The first and most important thing that Assyrians must urgently learn to do is to unite their people either on our ancestors' lands or in "Galūta" — diaspora. Every single Assyrian must learn to feel himself/herself as an integral part of the whole nation wherever he/she lives, whatever language he/she speaks. Every single Assyrian must keep in mind that we have only one beloved Motherland, and that is Atour, and only one capital which is Nineveh.

As soon as this highest ideal captures the minds and souls of the Assyrians, and is instilled into their flesh and blood, as soon as this highest ideal of Mother-Atour becomes the Assyrians' password and sacred name, they will be able to become, again, one people, one Nation, and the Assyrian banner will fly, sooner or later, over the UN headquarters in New York, beside flags of other free nations.

**TODAY HERE, TOMORROW IN NINEVEH!**



# ASSYRIANS OF RUSSIA FACING A DILEMMA: EMIGRATION, NO. REPATRIATION, YES.

*by Dr. Sargis Osipov, D.M. (Russia)*

*Published in the Assyrian Magazine "ATRA" No. 3, 1991, Moscow. Translated from the Russian by Ilia Vartanov.*

Within the last seven months, from the founding Conference of Assyrians of the U.S.S.R. in November 1990, to the official registration of the Assyrian Congress of the U.S.S.R. in the Ministry of Justice in June 1991, a number of steps have been taken, and these steps have affected all Assyrians in our country. However, from the very start, Assyrian leaders were being constantly asked one question about the ultimate goal, which in people's minds is linked to the idea of autonomy and/or a possible emigration from the Soviet Union.

A political and economical collapse in the country has caused a growing trend in the desire to emigrate, and Assyrians are highly involved in this process. Besides, the emigration desire of Assyrians has been affected by the aggravation of conflict between the various nations, to the extent that the Russian Republic recently encountered numerous Assyrian refugees arriving from the Soviet Caucasia, specifically, from Azerbaijan and Armenia. Actually, there is no one region in today's agonizing Soviet empire where Assyrians could feel safe and protected. On the other hand, an apparent liberalization of life as well as the relaxation of traveling restrictions give Assyrians the hope for a facilitated emigration to economically developed countries.

I happened lately to have visited almost all of the Assyrian communities in the U.S.S.R., and I became convinced that in most cases it is national humiliation that motivates our people to reach an absolute decision to emigrate. As a result of nationalistic trends, powerful nations which are dominating in 15 Soviet republics declared their sovereignty and independence. In this case the national minorities found themselves with no autonomy, and moreover, they were ignored by the authorities and treated as second class citizens. Thus, Assyrians have been threatened directly and forced to flee from Azerbaijan, namely the area of Khanlar, and they have just left their houses seeking ways to escape and save their lives.

At present, in neighboring Armenia and Georgia, Assyrians are deprived of any opportunity for promotion in the area of governmental jobs. Even in the city of Krasnodar (Russian Republic) Assyrian communities are segregated socially as well as politically. Additionally, Assyrians might be threatened or attacked by nationalist gangs and criminals who are practically terrorizing the streets in all of the cities and regions of the Soviet Union. We are, thus, facing a vital problem, and this has captured the minds and hearts (souls) of the overwhelming

majority of the Assyrians of the U.S.S.R. The problem of all problems is: where should Assyrians flee?

Reflecting on this issue, we realize that we face an East-West dilemma. If we analyze the state of Assyrian language and culture in economically developed western countries, we arrive at the bitter conclusion that within 50 to 100 years even the largest Assyrian communities in the West will be gradually losing their native language and national identity. In time, our nation in the West is going to be assimilated, and this trend seems to be unavoidable. In our opinion, the financial and economical prosperity of the West does damage, to be more precise, destroy the very Assyrian national consciousness. So, preserving our Assyrian nation in the West still remains a primary problem without a solution at present.

On the other hand, a careful study of the existing political situation in the Middle East shows that there are not any possibilities for establishing an independent Assyrian state in the homeland of the ancient Assyrian empire. Furthermore, today's aggressive and totalitarian ruling regimes in Iraq and Syria are threatening the very existence of the native Assyrian population in the two mentioned countries. The BA'ATH's terroristic regime has not ended oppressing Assyrians to the present.

In Iran, unlike in Iraq or in Syria, conditions are more favorable to the large Assyrian communities settled in the area of Urmia for centuries. Relationships between the Iranian authorities, the native population on the one side, and the Assyrian people on the other, have never been clouded by violence or any form of segregation. Even during World War I, the Assyrian genocide that was committed by the Turkish military and government, actually did not affect the Assyro-Persian interrelations. As to masses of Assyrians fleeing the Urmia region, this was, first of all, the consequence of Kurdish armed attacks supported widely by the Turkish military. Then, in the 1920s and 30s, the repatriation of many Assyrians from Russia back to Iran was yet another piece of evidence of the good treatment of Assyrians of Iran. Another apparent evidence of good Assyro-Persian relations was that of maintaining close ties between Soviet Assyrians — former citizens of Iran — and the embassy of Iran in Tbilisi, capital of Georgia. These good links did not end until 1949 when Stalin's ruling regime initiated cruel reprisals and mass exile against the Assyrian people.

Going back to the events of World War I, we now

can say that the hostility and conflict between the Assyrians and Persians came about due to British and Russian imperialistic policies. An outstanding Russian writer and researcher V. Shklovsky, who witnessed the events of the war, wrote that "The main reason for the sharp aggravation of Assyro-Persian relations was the involvement of the Assyrian people in the war as Great Britain and Russia's ally. Assyrians supported us Russians because we were linked by our Christianity and by several political promises given to them. In addition, various religious missions contributed much to the aggravation of the situation in Urmia. The Russian mission as well as German, French, British, and American literally hunted for the souls of those poor Nestorians, every single mission had its own selfish interests and purposes."

Now we can see that forcing the Assyrian people to become involved in World War I was an extremely dangerous mistake committed by the Assyrian leadership. That greatest of tragedies drove Assyrians to mass emigration beyond the Land of the Two Rivers, which was our historic and native land, our motherland, our "Atra." Thus, the process of "throwing rocks away" has started, and it is going on to present. We are now witnessing unabated emigration of Assyrians from their native lands, and we are very close to the situation where the growing western Assyrian communities will soon become larger than those still remaining in the Middle East, the lands of our forefathers. It would be very naive to believe that living in the economically developed and democratic West will stimulate the growth or Renaissance of the Assyrian culture and nation as a whole. The history of several nations, first, Jewish history, convinces us that only going back to the native land enables people to plan and build their own national future. It is time now, it is the very time to "collect rocks."

Today's Assyrian social, economic, and political situation in Iran gives us hope that friendly relations between Assyrians and Persians are possible. This might significantly help Assyrians of Iran not only to save their language but also to improve constantly their living standards.

Keeping in mind all that is said above, we may arrive at the conclusion that Repatriation and not Emigration to the West would be the most reasonable step for the Assyrians of Russia. Specifically, Assyrians with Iranian background should return to Iran. Of course, we are not seeking national autonomy in Iran; this would be naive. The best solution to the problem might be the practice of compact mass settlement of Assyrians in various areas of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, as it was the case for centuries. This might be considered as the only means to preserve our Assyrian nation and save it from completely perishing.

An objective and comprehensive analysis of the situation in Iran, as well as in the Soviet Union, is

needed to establish a program of Assyrian Repatriation. This might be a 3-year program, designed carefully, stage by stage, to include the following sequence of steps:

1. Establishing close contacts with the Assyrian communities in Iran so that representatives of Assyrians of Russia could get familiar with the real situation, and analyze a possibility of repatriation.

2. Building the material and technical basis that is needed for settlement of Assyrians of Russia will require the development of economic cooperation with our Assyrian compatriots living in Iran; this is a vital necessity.

3. It is also necessary to make contacts and cooperate with the State of Iran, specifically with the Embassy of Iran in Moscow, so that to give the Iranian side a clear idea about our purposes, which are strictly ethnic and not political. We will have to apply for permission for repatriation of Assyrians, and the return of their citizenship. This action, if taken by the Iranian side, might considerably improve relations between Iran and its Caucasian neighbors, i.e., Georgia and Armenia, where a huge mass of Assyrians are living.

4. In the case of transferring the Soviet economy into the free market, the property and real estate belonging to Assyrians of Russia might be purchased by joint Iranian-Russian companies, and this could be used as an extra source to provide the repatriating Assyrians with dwellings.

Of course, the above draft is a first one; the project of Assyrian repatriation to Iran does require a very careful and comprehensive analysis. Also huge efforts are to be expended to clarify the idea of repatriation to our Assyrian people, so that the common concept gains the support of all Assyrians of Russia.

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## COLLECTING ASSYRIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE

Surma d'Mar Shimun Mauro and Joyce Bynum of San Francisco want the Assyrian community to know that they are beginning a collection of Assyrian children's folklore, to include rhymes, songs, stories and games. They write that "we would like your help with this project, which we hope will contribute to preserving the Assyrian heritage for our children."

Any material that you may have, please send it to the attention of the Editor of *Nineveh*.



If you are “baptized” on a *Noosardy* Sunday  
grin and bear it with a chuckle!

## TRIAL BY NOOSARDY

A Story by Mikhael K. Pius

One morning, just after the mid-1940s, I came out of the church dressed in my Sunday best. I was then at the threshold of my manhood. I had Brylcreamed my dark brown kinky hair and had on a brand new greenish-grey gabardine suit and a light blue poplin shirt, with a red and blue necktie. And as I stepped out, my new tan shoes emitted a proud squeak! My suit and shirt were custom made by my friend Neeku *Darzi*, a popular local tailor. I had scrimped and saved from my meager salary as a third-grade clerk working for the Royal Air Force at Habbaniya to pay for the spic-and-span outfit — of which I was both fond and proud!

Although it was in the torrid July of Iraq, the morning was breezy and cool and I felt exuberant! But as I looked around, I saw gangs of boys and girls chasing each other across the traffic-free streets and in and out of alleyways dashing water on one another. They were shouting, yelling and screaming like the Red Indians do in the movies! But the commotion was punctuated by peals of joyful laughter, for to them the occasion was one of frolicsome fun! I should have smiled and felt good. Instead, I gazed down at my shining tan shoes with a loving eye, gently carressed the fine texture and cut of my gabardine coat, smoothed down my flashy necktie, frowned and heaved a big sigh!

It was *Noosardil* Sunday!

*Noosardil*, or *Noosardy* as it is popularly pronounced in spoken Assyrian, is an annual water festival. It is a day of riotous fun and frolic when children — and often grown-ups — roam Assyrian communities chasing each other and spraying water on one another. No one is immune from “attack” and the “victim” is expected to be tolerant and bear the consequence with a grin.

*Noosardy* usually falls in July on the first Sunday falling on or following the 100th day after Easter. It is celebrated in commemoration of Christian baptism. The festival is one of the many customs and traditions preserved and practiced by our tiny Assyrian nation. We have also managed to preserve our classical Assyrian language, the language Jesus himself spoke, and have clung faithfully to our Christianity despite untold persecution we have suffered at the hands of non-Christian races down the centuries for the sake of our religion. *Noosardy* is observed by all Assyrians, especially by those in

the countries of the East living in communities where they are the majority — such as the Assyrian community at Habbaniya, Iraq, where my little story took place.

As the congregation emerged from the church on that *Noosardy* morning, people milled around for a while, looking about them warily. Then they gradually dispersed in various directions, some strolling, some striding, some jogging and some running, but all of them hoping to reach home dry!

My right hand gently carressed the left sleeve of my gabardine coat as I gazed down the street and wondered how I could make the 300 yards to my home without getting wet! If I were dressed in ordinary clothes, I wouldn't have minded the water. In fact, I might have enjoyed grabbing a pail myself and joining the crazy, jovial gangs of sprinklers. But I was in my very best suit — and my brand new shoes! Drenched, they would be ruined! And although clean water was supposed to be used during *Noosardy*, children might even shower me with muddy or unclean water! Some of them were mischievous and reckless enough to do it too, like my younger brother who once had the temerity of “baptizing” — of all people! — a priest, and with soapy water, too!

I rearranged the knot of my flashy necktie and looked at my Rolex watch. It was just after nine. I thought of waiting it out at the church courtyard, but the game usually lasted till noontime. Besides, I was anxious to reach home soon not only to put away my new suit and shoes before the cool morning turned to a hot and sticky afternoon, but I was also eager to start a long letter to my uncle in Iran. Like someone fearing an ambush, I furtively looked about me and cautiously stepped away from the protective sanctuary of the church courtyard.

At the crossroads, two preteens on the street came toward me. They were half-naked and drops of water glistened on their brown bodies. They shuffled forward and halted a few paces away from me. One of them was about twelve and the other one was a little younger. The older one was husky and had a round belly. The younger boy was slimmer and had wet black hair that shone in the sun. The black-haired one stared at me from under black eyelashes and grinned.

“Today is *Noosardy*!” he yelled. “We will sprinkle

water on you!” he announced sheepishly.

The huskier one took two timidly aggressive steps forward and moved back his right hand holding a large can as though to swish the water at me. I instantly pointed my right forefinger at him and exclaimed: “Hey, stop!” and his hand froze in its assumed position!



I eyed their menacingly tense stances and dripping water cans and glared at them for a few moments, thinking! I then looked down and picked up a small stone from the unpaved gravelly road. Assuming a pugnacious stance, I wrinkled my brow and warned them sternly in Assyrian: “Look, if either of you wets me I shall break his head with this stone! I have some important papers in my pocket! If you wet me they will be ruined! Now, go on, scram!” I “screamed” to make my point.

Intimidated, the two boys timidly withdraw from my path. I felt a sense of relief as I walked past them, casting them an “angry” glance over my shoulder. But I also felt a stab of conscience when I saw the playfully impish grins disappear from the young faces! I had not only spoiled their fun but had also violated the spirit of *Noosardy*!

But hardly had I walked away a few paces when I heard a gasp followed by a wail! I glanced back and saw that the two boys had sneaked behind a luckless Arab resident passing by and emptied their water cans on him!

Coincidentally, the day was also Ed-El-Fitr, a Moslem holiday, and the “victim” was dressed up in his holiday finery. His nose dripping water and his clothes stained with wetness, the man stood and surveyed his “disaster.” He then yelled at the culprits and pretended to chase them. But as soon as the boys had started fleeing, he stopped on the street and began to chuckle to himself!

I stood and smiled for a moment, enjoying the tragicomedy. I then felt a sudden rush of blood to

my face when I realized that a non-Assyrian Moslem had not only shown more tolerance and understanding of the spirit of *Noosardy* than I, but had also found the incident amusing!

As I walked on and mused over the incident, I noticed a group of teenagers emerge from an alley and amble noisily toward the road. They were more than 30 yards away from me, but my heart gave a sudden lurch! All were in shorts and shirts of different kinds and colors, soaking wet, and were carrying dripping receptacles of various shapes and sizes. They advanced up the street toward me, chortling and horseplaying among themselves.



I glanced down the street. I was still a good 200 yards away from the safety of my home. I knew I couldn't scare these boys, and if I tried to chase them away there were too many. I could probably chase one or two, but the rest would be upon me from all sides like a “pack of hungry wolves!” I thought of rushing forward and trying to break through, but they were blocking my path menacingly. I could turn around and make a run for it, but I had nowhere to run to and I was sure they would run me down! My chances of escape were virtually zero! I stood still for a moment and stared at the “pack,” hands of dread clutching at my heart and my pulse racing! I began a “Hail Mary” and tried hard to think up a better plan of escape!

“Oooo! It is you!” the apparent leader of the gang finally shouted at me as he strutted and snickered while the others guffawed. “Where will you escape

from our hands!" he threatened.

The group approached closer across the road in a semi-circle. I scrutinized the speaker and saw a glimmer of hope! The tenseness in my body eased a bit and my thumping heart slowed down. Stroking the left sleeve of my gabardine coat, I stared at him for a few seconds and tried to think up a right approach. You see, he was a younger brother of my closest friend and I thought I could sweet-talk him into letting me off dry!

"Hello, Baaba!" I greeted him jovially.

"Hello, 'bridegroom'" Baaba replied, snickering. The others all chuckled and chortled. "Dressed ready for the wedding?"

"Man, you are all wet!" I said, with feigned surprise as though this was big news, ignoring his mocking humor.

"Yes, 'bridegroom,' we are wet," he replied.

"Man, you are not going to wet me, too?" I asked, smiling wistfully.

"And why not?" asked Baaba boldly with a crooked grin, his shorts and shirt stuck wetly to his skin and his animated brown eyes challenging me.

"No, we are not going to wet you," put in a skinny guy. "We are going to baptize you like a baby!" The whole gang hee-hawed with laughter.

"Man, my suit and shoes are new!" I announced.

"Please do not wet them!"

"Of course they are new," replied Baaba, smirk-

ing. "You have bought them for your wedding day, right?" The whole gang roared with laughter again.

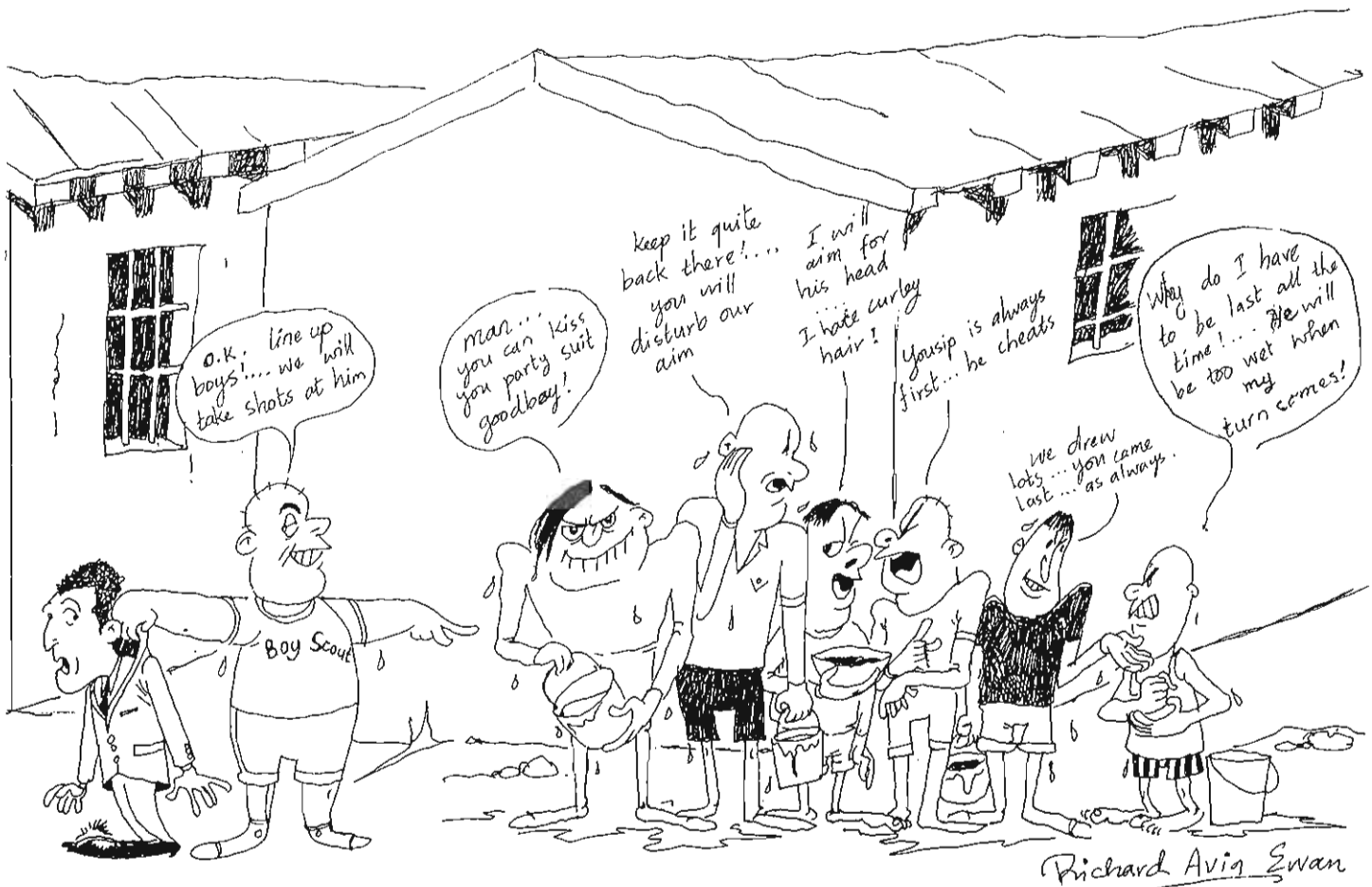
"By God, I am not lying!" I said with feeling. "My clothes are new!"

"Of course!" exclaimed Baaba. "I believe you! But old or new, we can't let you go, 'bridegroom'!" taunted Baaba.

"But if you wet my suit you will ruin it!" I pleaded again.

"We will not wet your pretty wedding suit," exclaimed a chubby-faced boy, "only your shiny dancing shoes!" The whole bunch burst into another fit of laughter.

"But I am your brother's best friend! Won't you



let me go? Please!" I begged once more as though I were actually pleading for my life.

"Oh, no! No! No! I can't! Today is *Noosardy*! Everyone must be 'baptized!' Friend or foe, or even . . . bridegrooms!" Looking at his gang members Baaba asked: "What do you say, boys?"

"Yes!" they all roared in unison, giggling.

Realizing that I had exhausted all my avenues, I then appealed to his finer instinct. "All right," I said, "but I am putting myself under your mercy, and I know you are a kind boy. If you must wet me because it is *Noosardy*, then please sprinkle a few drops of water on me and let me go! By God, my suit and shoes are new!" I repeated. "Also, I am invited to a party tonight, and this is my only good suit!" I looked directly at Baaba as I spoke.

As Baaba looked from me to his group members to see their reaction, one of the boys cried out: "My name is Youkhanna! (John) I shall baptize him!" So saying, he charged, swishing off the water in his can at me. I ducked, but some water splashed on my shoulder.

"Hey, Youki!" screamed Baaba at the sprinkler in anger. "You are Youkhanna, but I am the boss! I give the orders here! And none of you throw at him

unless I tell you to!" he warned the others.

I glared at my "attacker" and growled: "Look what you did to my coat, you fool! Baaba is the boss here, not you!"

I watched Baaba to see what effect my last statement had on him. He looked from me to his gang members again as he considered the situation, while I waited with my heart in my hands! And when he turned his gaze from his chattering and bickering gang to me again, I noticed that the challenging look on his face had changed to a smugly amused smile. I knew I had reached his ego!

The realization added to my sense of relief, but it also produced an increased sense of guilt and remorse as I recalled a similar episode a few years back! I was on the "attack" then as I confronted a couple and their little boy, all dressed up, scurrying to catch a long taxi ride to Baghdad. The husband explained their situation and both he and his wife pleaded with me to let them go. But unmoved to sympathy and intent on enjoying the festival fully, I drenched them all by one impulsive sweep of my overflowing bucket!



Baaba's now cheery voice snapped me out of my uneasy flashback as he said: "I think he is right, boys. We will have mercy on him and let him go home dry. The 'Baptist' has already 'baptized' him and we will not ruin his pretty party clothes!" He giggled.

"And we won't send his poor dry bride a wet bridegroom!" shouted a short fellow over the crescendo of giggles.

Relieved but humbled, I continued on my way as they let me pass through. Once more I breathed freely, but glimpses of sprinkling boys and girls darting in and out of the Cantonment's alleys quickened my pace. I had only a short distance to go, but I was still not out of danger, and I longed to be home!

"Hey, look behind you!" a shrill feminine voice warned me from across the street. Started silly, I glanced back and saw a long-legged, bare-footed man following me. He was in a vest and khaki shorts. Holding a big dirty-looking bucket by the handle, he was stealthily treading his way toward me!

In a flash I realized that none of my previous ruses would help me this time, and that there was no time to think! But lucky for me he was behind me and not in front. There was only one thing for me to do, and that was to run! And I lost no time! I took to my heels like a scared rabbit!

The man scampered after me, water sloshing over from his full bucket. He was about 10 yards behind me, but as I looked back over my shoulder his long-legged paces seemed to be gaining ground! I drove myself harder and raced for dear life! I heard him grunting and panting as he struggled after me. But a second backward glance eased my panic. Hindered by his heavy slopping bucket, my pursuer was running out of wind, and was slowing down to a halt!

I then slowed down to a walk, snorting and panting like a spent race horse! I had run the 100 yard dash in record time, and I was almost home!

Smoothing down my dishevelled nicktie, and wiping my sweaty face with my handkerchief, I strutted on and turned toward our open door. My mother was standing inside our roofed courtyard, gazing out at me and smiling. I beamed back at her. "Whew!" I panted. "At last I reached home dry!" I said in triumph.

But actually I wasn't quite home yet. There were four more paces to go before stepping inside through the doorway. And in the space and time of four steps anything could happen. And it did!

I almost jumped out of my skin — or new suit! — as I felt a horrifying splash of cold water upon my scalp! I leapt into our courtyard like a shot-at gazelle! But not before a whole gallon of water had been poured over me!

A chilling sensation tingled my skin as the water

went running down my body and descended into my socks and new tan shoes! My kinky dark-brown hair was soaking wet, my right ear was brimming and drumming with water and the tips of my chin and nose were dripping like palm fronds in the rain. My once-flashy necktie was clammily stuck over my soggy light-blue poplin shirt and much of my gabardine coat and trousers were stained wet by the dark discoloration of water. In general, I looked and felt like a miserable wet dog!

Suddenly, I heard a juvenile laughter "exploding" overhead! I stalked outside, the once-proud squeak in my tan shoes turned to a humiliating "luch-luch" I turned around and stared up above the doorway. And there, upon the rooftop, behind the low parapet, my indignant eyes met the chuckling face of my mischievous and impulsive younger brother!

I stood stock-still and glared at him for a full minute as he continued to chuckle. Then in spite of myself, I slowly began to grin. And before I knew it, I had joined my brother in a fit of laughter!

*During the 1936 to 1955 British era of Habbaniya, our family lived in the Civil Cantonment for 14 years. Habbaniya was a Royal Air Force base 55 miles west of Baghdad City, and Civil Cantonment was the camp where the R.A.F. local civilian employees and their families dwelt. The Cantonment was a mixture of Assyrians, Armenians, Kurds, Arabs, Indians and people of a few other faces, all living together in comparative tranquility.*

*Adjoining the Civil Cantonment was the Levy Camp in which the R.A.F. Levy soldiers and their families lived. Levies were a local military force formed of some Kurds and Yezidis and of former Assyrian refugees dislodged by the Moslem Kurds and Turks from their homelands in Hakkari Mountains in southeastern Turkey and on the Urmia Plain in Persia during the Great War. They were employed by the British to guard the air base which, in turn, was a watchdog*

guarding the British oil interests in Iraq and Iran. Habbaniya was also Great Britain's lifeline to the Persian Gulf, a vital fueling station to the British Fleet protecting the Empire's routes to Pakistan, India and beyond.

Most of the few-thousand-strong Levies were Assyrians, allies of Great Britain (and Russia and France) during the Great War. In their earlier years following the war, the Assyrian Levies were successfully used by the British — though much to the political detriment of Assyrians as a whole — to put down Kurdish and Arab tribal uprisings in the country. The Assyrian Levy companies once played a vital role in defending Habbaniya against a pro-Nazi rebel Iraqi Army siege in May 1941, thereby saving the entire Middle East from falling under Nazi domination. Due to their fighting efficiency, the Assyrian Levies suffered only a handful of casualties during the one-month campaign, but the Assyrians also lost a dozen civilians in German air raids over the air base. And Assyrian paratroops fought, and died, with distinction in Europe for the Allied cause during the Second World War, as the Assyrian nation did in the First World War on the Allied side without ever gaining its national territorial or political reward from its victorious "Christian allies!"

The Civil Cantonment and the Levy Camp combined, which occupied only one small corner of the four-square-mile air base, contained some two thousand plus mudbrick bungalow-like attached uniform dwellings of several classes in which more than 15 thousand souls lived. The big majority of this population was Assyrian, and hence the celebration of Noosardy. But the minority Armenian community also participated in the festival.

### The Cartoonist Richard Avia Ewan

Richard, who's 27, is the youngest of the three children of Regina (nee WardaKhammo) and Avia Ewan of Middlesex, England. He is an amateur artist and a civil engineer by profession. He works for Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners. He graduated from college in February 1989 and has won prizes for his art work in school. He's tall, slim and handsome, with dark curly hair and moustache. "Who knows," he says, "maybe a beautiful Assyrian girl, preferably with a father who owns several farms in California, may take interest in a Civil Engineer/Artist from the old country!" (As a cartoonist, he's joking, of course!) Richard has done some work for the Assyrian Journal of the Church of the East in London.

Mikhael K. Pius

### SHLIMON ZIA GILLIANA OF JEELU His Crucial Role to World War II Victory by Solomon (Sawa) Solomon



On June 22, 1941, Hitler launched operation Barbarossa against Russia. Three million German soldiers crossed the border in a campaign that was to take them all the way to the Volga River. This war became above all a battle of supplies and Russia needed millions of tons. It was a race against time and the allies tried to find many ways, but the greatest one was to be the Iraq-Persia-Southern Russia route. By coincidence, it was an Assyrian from Jeelu who directed the movement of war materiel through Iraq by rail. He was to play a crucial role in the allied victory over the axis powers. That man, Shlimon Gilliana, is the subject of this article.

Shlimon was born in February, 1906, in the village of Mar Zia, to Deacon Zia; his grandfather Gilliana was a deacon also. He was to study in the village under Archdeacon Joseph Shlimon. Later on, while in Persia, he continued schooling in the Presbyterian school in Charbash. In 1918 Shlimon studied at the American Educational School in the Baquba refugee camp and later, in Baghdad, he completed high school at the Latin school in 1923.

After that Shlimon was to receive diplomas from many colleges in England through correspondence.

In 1923 Shlimon joined the Iraqi railways. Later on he studied telegraphy, traffic movement and commercial operations. He entered traffic operations in 1935 and was appointed the head of the movement section of the Traffic Department.

The second World War saw a great expansion of the Iraqi railways. The British military took over control. It was then that Shlimon was appointed the head of this movement section, on strong recommendation of the British embassy and the military. He was also to act as liaison between the military and the civilians. It was during these crucial years that he was mentioned three times in the British war office Gazette for valuable service to the war effort with strong recommendations by the British Ambassador Sir Kinahan Cornwallis.

After the war Shlimon was appointed by royal decree as Chief Divisional Traffic Superintendent with grade one class two.

After the Baghdad Pact was created by the United States as a bulwark against Russian expansion, Shlimon took part as committee member in preparing plans for the defense of the Middle East. In 1959 Shlimon Gilliana retired from the railway. He now lives in the greater Chicago area.

C. F. Nicoll, Esq  
Iraqi State Railways

Dear Mr. Nicoll:

The British Military Authorities have brought to my notice their appreciation of the services which Mr. S. Z. Gilliana, Section Superintendent of the Iraqi State Railways, has rendered in connection with the war effort.

I am very gratified to learn of the good work which Mr. Gilliana has performed and of the high opinion which the Army has formed of his capacity. I should like to add an expression of my own appreciation of Mr. Gilliana's services in these difficult times and I shall be grateful if you will inform him accordingly.

Kinahan Cornwallis  
British Embassy, Baghdad

Dear Mr. Gilliana:

The enclosed letter from His Excellency the British Ambassador conveying to you the appreciation of the British Military Authorities for the services you have rendered in connection with the war effort is forwarded and it gives me pleasure to be able to endorse the remarks contained therein.

Yours sincerely,

H. C. Smith  
Major General,  
Director General  
Iraqi State Railways

## THE CONTINUITY OF THE ASSYRIAN IDENTITY From the Fall of the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C. to the Assyrian Christian Period

*The destruction of the Assyrian empire did not wipe out its population. They were predominantly peasant farmers, and since Assyria contains some of the best wheat land in the Near East, descendants of the Assyrian peasants would, as opportunity permitted, build new villages over the old cities and carry on with agricultural life, remembering traditions of the former cities. After seven or eight centuries and various vicissitudes, these people became Christians. These Christians, and the Jewish communities scattered amongst them, not only kept alive the memory of the sites of their Assyrian predecessors but also combined them with traditions from the Bible. The Bible, indeed, came to be a powerful factor in keeping alive the memory of Assyria and particularly of Nineveh.*

### The Might That Was Assyria

H. W. F. Saggs  
Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages  
University College, Cardiff

## "DESTITUTE AND FORSAKEN"

### *Nestorian Christians in Iraq*

A few days ago we received a call at our office from Dr. Petros Yoseph De Baz, a leading member of the Nestorian Christians in Iraq. Dr. Petros, who was accompanied by Rev. Charles Fisher, of West Norwood, is a fully qualified medical man, and a former student of All Nations' Bible College. On the completion of his studies in this country, in 1931, he returned to Iraq, in the hope of being permitted to labor among his suffering compatriots. The Iraq government, however, would not allow him to labor among his own people, but sent him to a Mohammedan district. The following article has been written by Dr. Petros, in order that Christian people in this country may be constrained to earnest prayer on behalf of a people whose story is a tragic record of betrayal and persecution. Dr. Petros is expecting to proceed to the United States, in the hope of enlisting sympathy for his people in that country also.

Most European people interested in the Eastern Churches know something of the history of the Nestorian Church. The Assyrians were among the first to accept the Gospel, and tradition has it that they were converted as a result of the labors of the Apostles Thomas and Thaddeus. Their language is Aramaic or Syriac, the same as that spoken by our Lord in the days of His flesh. The Assyrian Church became actively missionary, and during a thousand years contributed to the spread of the Gospel and the advancement of education in the East. It is on record that during the successive regimes of Persians, Arabs, and Turks, the Assyrian Christians were the eyes and brain of the powers which ruled over them.

Since the earliest centuries the Nestorian Christians have been subject to severe persecution, but the greatest blow fell during the War, when they lost their homes and two-thirds of the people perished from war, massacre, famine and disease. The Assyrians at the outbreak of the War threw in their lot with the Allies, and fought valiantly on their side in the Middle East. Their fighting qualities were such that they kept Turkish reinforcements occupied, and actually turned the tide in favor of the British in Mesopotamia.

### **Malarial Swamps**

At the end of the War, instead of being given back their fertile lands in the Kurdistan mountains, which were left in the possession of defeated Turkey, they were settled in villages on the wasted plains of Mosul, so full of malarial swamps that they had already been evacuated by Arabs. The first report of their condition was

given by Rev. William Chauncy Ernhardt, secretary for Europe and the Near East of the National Council of the Episcopal Church. Mr. Ernhardt visited these people in the villages, in 1924, and reported "the condition of the Nestorians pitiful indeed. They are a mountainous people forced to live on the plains. Almost every one of them had become a victim of malaria. Infant mortality has reached an alarming stage. Less than one percent of the children survived the first year (1921). The Church was in equally pathetic condition."

Mr. R. C. Cumberland, a Presbyterian missionary in the district of Mosul, in 1930 (at a time when the condition of the Nestorians was much better than it has been since, especially since the mandate terminated), reported, "Even among those who are now in the villages, one can sense the feeling that they consider themselves ready to run at a moment's notice; the gloom of despair



*Dr. Petros Yoseph De Baz*

is such that a community of eight or ten households has been living, since 1924, in the caves above Alkosh, and seeking out a precarious existence by such menial labor as the established citizens of the community may choose to give them."

A British lady eye-witness reported: "All babies are born with malaria. Half of them, more fortunate than the rest, die before they are one year old. Endurance cannot last forever, and now that disease is attacking their last stronghold, their great strength and vitality, only God or His servants on earth can save them."

Now there is an even more tragic story to tell. The Assyrians were promised British protection and mandatory rule for twenty-five years, in



order to protect them from their fanatical neighbors. They relied upon the promise; but eleven years had scarcely passed when the mandate was terminated in 1932, and the small group of Christians were left to the mercy of a different and fanatical race.

Then followed the tragedy which illustrates the character of the people who now rule that unhappy land. Only a few months after the mandate was surrendered, inflammatory speeches were delivered in the Iraq Parliament and articles appeared in the press, inciting to a holy war (Jahad). In the mosques, meetings headed by members of the Parliament, were held against the Assyrians. Wholesale massacre began on August 11, 1933. Sixty-five Nestorian villages were sacked, burned or otherwise destroyed by Iraqi troops and tribesmen. Hundreds of men, women and children were slain in cold blood, for no other reason than that they were Christians. Their bones lie amid the ruins of their homes, and their blood cries, if not for vengeance, at least for justice.

There is evidence that the massacre was no sudden or unexpected ebullition of popular fury; it was long premeditated and skillfully planned. The first impulse was given from Baghdad, and the officers who took active part in it were promoted.

Rev. R. C. Cumberland testifies, "This I know. All, or nearly all, of the Assyrian villages in the plain have been looted. Most of the looting was done by Arabs and Kurds; most of the killing was done by the Army. The massacre of Simel is known to you. The inhabitants of eleven villages having been told to come in from the surrounding villages for protection, came without arms, and were shot down in cold blood by the army. Such an exhibition of stark savagery and frenzied fanaticism has seldom been seen. At Simel was proved what fanatical Islam and an irresponsible government are capable of, and it will not soon be forgotten."

### Plight of Women and Children

After the massacre, thousands of women and children were left without any male relatives. Some of the orphans and women were collected in a camp in Mosul, but the rest were left in a most miserable condition in the villages and in the streets of Mosul. The following statement is from Mrs. Seton Lloyd (an English lady), who, with her husband, is excavating the statues and bas-reliefs for European and American museums. Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd are connected with the University of Chicago. Mrs. Lloyd writes in *The Vogue*: "From Ain Sefni we would take mules and ride up into the mountains to an even smaller village where we intended staying a few months

to do some excavation. Our journey was especially interesting as we went right through the district where 600 Assyrian Christians had been massacred last summer. We saw many pathetic families wandering about with all their belongings. Frightened, starved and diseased — it seems incredible that they could be so hated and persecuted. In comparison, the Kurds are amazing looking, tough and strong; they wear long plaits hanging down under their turbans. Their belts are stuck with daggers, and they nearly all carry rifles, distributed to them at the time of the massacres."

Still more recent reports show that the Kurds are being stirred up against the Assyrians, in the hope that a local "emunte" may start a general massacre and give opportunity for the extermination of the hated minority. The suffering of these people is increasing day by day. The League of Nations has not yet been able to find for them a new home. The winter is coming, and thousands are in imminent danger of perishing by famine and disease.

Will Christian brethren ignore the needs of this remnant of the great Assyrian Christian Church, which, in spite of twelve centuries of Islamic oppression, retains its faith and its primitive liturgy in the very language used by our Lord during His earthly ministry?

*Submitted by Clare Zia*

## ASSYRIAN-AMERICAN APPOINTED TO POSITION FOR UNITED NATIONS NGO

Pamella Saffer, an Assyrian-American from New Haven, Connecticut, was recently appointed Director of Liaison to the United Nations for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). WILPF is a Non-Governmental Organization with international headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

As Director of Liaison, Ms. Saffer is responsible for monitoring UN activities affecting disarmament, development and human rights.

In May of this year, Ms. Saffer visited Iraq as a member of an international women's delegation headed by Margarita Papandreou of Women for Mutual Security. Hosted by the Federation of Iraqi Women, the delegation was charged with assessing the effects of the Persian Gulf War on Iraqi women and children and determining the need for humanitarian aid.

Members of the delegation visited hospitals and met with family members of war victims as well as prominent Iraqi officials, including Deputy Foreign

Minister, Tariq Aziz.

Since her return from Iraq, Ms. Saffer has made presentations recounting her observations before civic organizations and university groups as well as radio and television audiences on the eastern seaboard.

A textile artist and longtime peace activist, Ms. Saffer is the daughter of Kasper and Phyllis Saffer of Worcester, Massachusetts.

*Submitted by Francis Hoyen, Jr., Worcester, Mass.*

## UNPO ADMITS ASSYRIANS TO ITS FORUM

On August 5, 1991, at the Second General Assembly of UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization) held in Hauge, The Netherlands, the Assyrians were officially accepted as members of this body. The Assyrian flag now flies alongside the flags of other nations and peoples whose human rights, economic needs, cultural identities and other causes are not addressed and heard in existing international body. In this forum, the Assyrians now have the opportunity to voice their concerns. UNPO was established in Hague in February 1991, dedicated to peaceful programs and guidelines.

Daniel Crisby, Secretary General of the Assyrian Universal Alliance, and Senator John J. Nimrod, a member of AUA and vice-president of the AUA Foundation were invited to attend UNPO's Second General Assembly as observers. After reviewing the Assyrian documents and case, UNPO accepted them as members representing all Assyrians worldwide from the Assyrian Universal Alliance. Senator Nimrod then addressed the Assembly.

Dr. Joseph Yacoub of Lyon, France, was also invited by UNPO as a guest speaker where he addressed its body on the topic "Use of Force by States on Their People." Other invitees as guests were the officers of the Assyrian organization in Holland along with Dr. Sasbo Celin.



*UNPO Assembly in session. Seated fourth from left: Senator John J. Nimrod, Daniel and Dr. Sasbo Celin.*



*Senator John J. Nimrod signs the Covenant of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization on behalf of all Assyrians. Witnessing the signing are Daniel Crisby (left) and Dr. Sasbo Celin (right). Also present at the signing (not in this picture) was Dr. Michael C. van Walt, UNPO Secretary General and a Dutch diplomat.*



*UNPO Assembly in session. The Assyrian flag (second from left) is prominently displayed.*



*Daniel Crisby showing the Assyrian flag to U.S. Ambassador, and the design it represents.*

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## LETTERS TO THE ASSYRIAN FOUNDATION OF AMERICA

To the fine people at the Assyrian Foundation of America and the dedicated staff of *Nineveh* magazine, thank you for bringing joy and a sense of identity to our people, a true labor of love.

Solomon S. Solomon  
Chicago, IL

I must thank you for your time and your great effort in such a noble cause. Please accept my small contribution for my fellow needy Assyrians in Turkey. Our prayers are with them and so are our hearts.

Have a very healthy and goal-fulfilling 1992.

Wiska K. Pius  
Miles City, Montana

I am writing this letter to thank you all very much for the educational assistance award. I can never thank you enough.

Your letters and assistance are a big inspiration for me. I hope to always make you and our culture proud. Thank you again.

Liliane Abi-Chahine  
Modesto, CA

I am delighted to write to you again to express my gratitude to the executive board of the Assyrian Foundation of America for granting financial assistance to three graduate Assyrian students in Lebanon (the family of Joseph De Mar Youssef).

I am certain the above mentioned family will very soon acknowledge the receipt of your grant and will express their gratitude to all of you once the communications with Lebanon are available.

For now, and on behalf of the students of Mar Youssef family, I join my voice with other Assyrians to express our admiration and gratitude to the Assyrian Foundation of America for your dedication to assist Assyrian students seeking higher education.

For this and other noble goals of general benefits, the Assyrian Foundation of America will be always remembered, appreciated and blessed by the Assyrian people.

What a noble gesture and goal for any Assyrian organization or individual by helping needy and unfortunate Assyrians.

Keep up the goodwill and God bless you all. Again, I am grateful to all of you.

Michael Younan  
San Jose, CA

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Thank you very much for the scholarship grant from your organization which was very helpful to me. I am taking private lessons with Prof. Vamos and his wife, who are world-renowned violin teachers and head of the string department of the University of Minnesota. Besides that, I take a music theory class through the University. I would not have been able to do this without the help of some Assyrian organizations and some private sponsor.

I am now preparing for the Minnesota Orchestra Young Performers Competition and the Carl Nielsen International Violin Competition in Denmark next summer.

I will keep you informed about any results or new developments in my career. Thank you very much for your generosity.

David A. Yonan  
Minneapolis, MN

I wish to express to the Assyrian Foundation of America my hearty, warm and deep thanks with appreciation for the financial assistance granted to my children Paul, Theodore and Lisette, for their education. You will be pleased to know that they are doing very well in school after an interruption of two years due to the war. The help you provided was very timely. Thank you once again.

Yoseph de Mar Youssef  
Beirut, Lebanon

## APPRECIATION

*Joseph E. Benjamin, Certified Public Accountant, and a member of the Assyrian Foundation of America, was the guest speaker at the Foundation's meeting in February. Joseph spoke about pertinent 1991 tax laws and the tax changes for 1992. During the question period he responded to many questions relating to financial matters of various kinds, such as wills, trust funds, mortgages, tax shelters, capital gains taxes, etc. The members of the audience displayed great interest in the lecture and discussion. We wish to thank Joe for a very informative evening.*



*At the Board of Directors Meeting (left to right): Sami Neesan - Membership, Belles Yelda - President, Sargon Shabbas - Social, Charles Yonan - Vice-President, Martin Jacob - Education, Nathan Nasseri - Secretary, Julius N. Shabbas - Treasurer.*



*At the Assyrian Foundation Meeting*



*At the Assyrian Foundation Meeting*





*At the Assyrian Foundation Meeting*





*At the Assyrian Foundation Meeting*





*At the Assyrian Foundation Meeting*



*At the Assyrian Foundation Meeting*

# AN ASSYRIAN TRAIN OF EVENTS FROM THE TIME OF THEIR EXODUS FROM THEIR HOMES IN TURKEY AND PERSIA TO MESOPOTAMIAN REFUGEE CAMPS IN 1918

*by Rabie Yoab Jacob*

This has not been an easy subject to write. All the records and papers which my father, the late Rabie Yacob Zia Yacob, had kept for many years were abandoned during our mass exodus from Urmia, Persia, in 1918, so that of material prepared or preserved as such, I had none. The loss of a slowly collected library bearing on the chief interests of a man's life is a real handicap, less only than the loss of serious and important documents.

Fortunately for me, my father had kept a diary in which various events had been recorded, this was saved by him and it helped me enormously, so that when I was asked by the Political Officer at Headquarters, where I was employed as vernacular translator from Syriac to English and vice versa, and Secretary to P.O., to compile a brief history of events, I was fortunate to have access to this diary, which enabled me to prepare for him this document. Within this limitation and the loss of my father's written impressions, I stand ready to be corrected.

My father was Professor of Aramaic at the English Mission Theological College, first at the city of Van, Turkey, and later at the city of Urmia, Persia, 1905-1915. He was also a member of the Board of Directors of the two Assyrian newspapers published in Urmia, and has contributed many articles, etc. to them on various subjects.

Such then were the phases of the situation and the sentiments of those therewith concerned during those terrible years of hardship and suffering. My object now is to present these historic facts about the trials and tribulations of the Assyrian people, and their life in refugee camps, which may be of interest to your readers. Other people have written on this subject, but I thought it would be appropriate to offer it in its original version, since it was carefully reviewed, approved and included in a lengthy document submitted to higher sources.

Midsummer 1918 saw the arrival in Mesopotamia (Iraq) of some fifty thousand destitute and exhausted refugees. Before Moslem oppression and armed hostility by Turks, Kurds and Persians, these Christians, men, women and children, had been forced to flee from their former homes in the Mountains of Hakkiari and plains lying between Lake Van in Turkish territory, and Lake Urmia in Persia, and seek protection from the British, whose ally they had declared themselves to be, some three years previously. They are of ancient Christianity and may be grouped under two distinct headings:

(a) Assyrians from the district of Hakkiari in Turkish Kurdistan, and formerly Turkish

subjects.

(b) Assyrians of Urmia and Salmas Plains and formerly Persian subject.

## **The Mountaineer Assyrians from Turkey**

The Assyrians formed a semi-independent small "Millet" (nation) in the Ottoman Empire. They are the remnants of a very fine old race of people, whose headquarters resided at Ctesipon in Mesopotamia, but the uprising of Islam followed by the massacres of Tamerlane drove them into Persia from where they slowly migrated into Turkish Kurdistan. Prior to the First World War they numbered about 100,000 souls, but this number included some thousands who had emigrated to America. The greatest number of these Assyrians dwelt between Mosul, Lake Van and Lake Urmia, and may be divided into two sections, the Ashirat of Free Tribesmen, and the Rayat of subject people.

Dealing first with the Christians of Hakkiari in Turkish Kurdistan, as I mentioned above, these were divided into two categories:

- (1) Ashirat or Tribal Assyrians.
- (2) The Rayat or subject people.

The tribal Assyrians lived in almost inaccessible fastnesses on the upper waters of Great Zab. They were for the most part shepherds, armed with obsolete weapons and acknowledging no lordship other than their Patriarch and their Maliks. The Turks had no direct dealings with them, but when opportunity occurred, used all their influence to set the Kurdish tribes against them. The Assyrians on the other hand, were always ready for reprisals against the Kurds. Both classes were free from national aspirations, and on that account escaped the Armenian massacres of 1895 and 1896. They remembered, however, what the British Government had done for them at the time of the Badr Khan Massacres of 1840, and in time of stress, always looked at H.B.M.'s Consuls at Van and Mosul for support.

In the autumn of 1913, a Russian Emissary toured the Assyrian tribal districts, distributing lavish gifts and promising modern rifles for the acceptancy of Orthodoxy. So for many years the Assyrians had cherished the hope that either the English or Russians would set them free from the oppressions under which they were suffering; and it was only natural, therefore, that when war broke out, their sympathies would be with the allies as against the Turks. Consequently in May, 1915, when the Russians advanced to Julamerk, they

were persuaded to attack the Turks, as a result of overtures and promises made to them by the Russian Commander. They naturally thought the Russians intended holding Julamerk and supporting them. Instead of this they were told a few days later, that the Russians intended to withdraw. This meant their destruction. Accordingly, they asked the Russian Commander for three days in which to collect their people for the evacuation of their country, or at least that arms and ammunition be given them in sufficient quantity to defend themselves. The requests were refused, the Russian force withdrew, and the Turks attacked the Assyrians in strength. After six months of severe fighting, these Assyrians, with their women and children, exhausted, destitute and without ammunition were driven from their homes into northwestern Persia. The Turks then proceeded to lay waste their country and every village was destroyed.

Although the Assyrians regarded this act of the Russians as a breach of good faith between allies, nevertheless, they again agreed, after their arrival in Persia, to assist the Russians, who called on them for their services in that country. Some three thousand men were organised and placed under the command of Russian officers, and became an integral part of the Russian Army. These men were in active service under Russian direction against the Turks and Kurds until the dissolution of the Russian Army, and during the early part of 1918 formed part of the irregular force (still commanded however by Russian officers) that defended the plains of Urmia and Salmas, and held the Turks in check on the frontier. In fourteen distinct engagements, between March and July, 1918, they defeated every force that was brought against them, in conjunction with the Armenians. Eventually attacked simultaneously by Turks, Kurds and Persians, the position of the Assyrians and Armenians became hopeless, and the flight to the British commenced late in July.

### **The Urmian Assyrians**

It is now necessary to touch briefly on the unhappy position of the Christians in the Urmia Plains. In the year 1897, a Russian Orthodox Mission appeared in Urmia and promised political support to all who would accept Orthodoxy. With the exception of the few adherents of the American and French Missions, all Assyrians of the Urmia plains enrolled, but the expected protection did not materialize for some time to come, and until the year 1907, the Christians of the plains continued to be a contented and prosperous community of cultivators, etc., living on friendly terms with their Persian masters, and suffering only an occasional raid from the border Kurds.

About this time some Turkish troops crossed the Persian frontier, and with the assistance of the

Begzadeh Kurds, expelled the Assyrians from the district of Tergawar. The Turks continued their advance on to the plains of Urmia, arousing Russian suspicion about their intentions. The Russians thereupon dispatched some Cossacks to the village of Mawana for the purpose of repatriating the Assyrians of Tergawar, but they were defeated by the Kurds, who captured and grossly insulted the officer-in-charge. The repatriation scheme was then for the moment abandoned, and the majority of the Christians settled on the Urmia plains until the year 1915, when an overwhelming Russian Army compelled the Kurds to vacate the district.

Such is briefly the history of the Christians of Urmia plains up to autumn 1914, when prior to the declaration of war between Russia and Turkey, a strong force of Turks and Kurds crossed the Persian border, burned several Assyrian villages and attacked the Russian troops of Urmia. The Assyrians of the plains were immediately armed and called upon to assist in the defence of the town—thus the Assyrians of the plains threw in their lot with the Russians. In the following December the Turks attacked again and succeeded in driving out the Russians. Many of the Assyrians left with them, but some 10,000 were trapped. Of these about 4,000 were killed or died of disease, while imprisoned in the American Mission area. Their homes were destroyed, churches burned, the men massacred, their women violated, and girls carried away captives. This was done directly by Kurds, Turks and Persian neighbours.

May 1915 saw the reoccupation of Urmia by the Russians, followed in August by a second evacuation when most of the American missionaries left, accompanied by Assyrians. During the summer of 1915 as mentioned previously, the Assyrian mountaineers from Turkish territory arrived amongst their co-religionists in the Persian districts of Khoi, Salmas and Urmia. In the spring of 1915, the Russians had advanced south and west into Kurdistan accompanied by Assyrian and Armenian troops. For some eighteen months after this the Moslems and Christians lived in comparative peace on the Urmia and Salmas plains. But when the breakup of the Russian Army occurred, trouble recommenced.

Early in November 1917 the Russians having decided to withdraw their forces from northwest Persia, the serious question arose, as to what the Assyrian nation was to do. It was eventually decided that they would remain, and along with the Armenians in the north endeavour to hold the Persian frontier against the Turks. They accepted arms and ammunition from the Russians to do this, and some Russian officers along with one French officer stayed on as their instructors. This arming of the Christians was very much resented by the Persians and eventually led to many disturbances.

In January 1918, a British officer arrived at Urmia and promised to support the Assyrians in their war against the Turks. Shortly after, a French Military Mission was sent, but on account of hostilities on the part of the Persians, withdrew. Events followed rapidly. The Persians having ordered the Assyrians to disarm, and this not being obeyed, forcibly tried to do so. This led to disturbances in Khoi, Salmas and Urmia. In the latter town on the 22nd of February the Assyrians inflicted a heavy defeat on the Persians. Peace was prevented through the interference of outside Persians. Simko (Ismail Agha), a Kurdish Chief of Kotur, invited Mar Shimun, the Patriarch, to a peace conference, on the conclusion of which Mar Shimun and his followers were treacherously murdered. When the news reached the town of Urmia, the Kurds were promptly massacred by the Assyrians.

An Assyrian force under General Agha Petros was immediately organised and dispatched to punish Simko in his fortress of Chara. After 36 hours fighting, Simko was defeated and many of his people killed; but he himself with some 500 followers escaped to Khoi. About the middle of April a Turkish force was reported to be advancing from the direction of Soujboulak and Ushnu. The Assyrians advanced to meet this force, defeated the Turks, and captured some guns near Ushnu. But the opposition of the Persian democrats against the Assyrians, some 4,000 of them living in Khoi, were ruthlessly massacred, only a few women and children being left. From this time on, until the end of July the Assyrians were hard put to defend themselves against the combined forces of Turks, Kurds and Persians, and threatened by overwhelming numbers, and without ammunition, they were finally forced to leave their homes in the Urmia plains, and to start off on their long southernly march through hostile country to seek shelter behind the British, whom they had long expected to come to their succour.

### **The Flight of the Christians Into Mesopotamia**

The evacuation was not completed before the Persian populace were killing women and children, old men and sick, in the streets of the city, and following along the road to cut the throats of stragglers without respect to age and sex. Some 10,000 Christians were cut off and never able to join the exodus, their fate being unknown, though it is conjectured most of them were massacred. The massacre continued for the greater part of the entire trek of 300 miles; but when a small British force was met at Sain Qaleh, the horrors of the journey were somewhat mitigated during the last 200 miles.

From Urmia to Hamadan the road was already in a devastated condition having been laid waste by

the hostilities between Turkey and Russia. Consequently the awful hardships that the refugees suffered, resulted in thousands of them dying from starvation and exhaustion on the roadside, besides the enormous number that were killed or died from disease. Others were stripped and many taken prisoners. Eventually, the remnants, some 50,000 strong, destitute and broken in spirit and body, arrived at Hamadan in the middle of August, 1918.

Early in July 1918, a British aeroplane was dispatched from Miaweh to Urmia carrying a letter with the proposal that the Assyrians should break through the Turkish lines at Soujboulak and take over a convoy of ammunition and Lewis guns from the British at Sain Qaleh on a certain date. British officers were also to accompany them back to Urmia and take over from the Russian officers the training of the Assyrian force. The Assyrians agreed to this. But no sooner had they left Urmia for Sain Qaleh, than Turks, Kurds and Persians simultaneously swept down on Urmia and forced the immediate evacuation of the Assyrians and Armenians. The British convoy had arrived at Sain Qaleh on the prescribed day to find the non-arrival of the Assyrian force. After waiting three days the convoy was compelled to retire, on account of the difficulty of getting supplies. Eight days later on August 2nd, the convoy returned and met the Assyrians, but it was then too late to save the situation.

### **The Formation of a Refugee Camp at Baquba, Mesopotamia**

The site of the camp was chosen on the right bank of the River Diyala, about three miles from the town of Baquba, which lies about 33 miles northeast from Baghdad. Baquba stands on the main caravan route from Baghdad to Hamadan, and on the railway from Baghdad to the Persian border. Thus, water and food supply presented no difficulty.

Toward the end of August 1918, the Assyrian and Armenian refugees started to pour into Baquba, exhausted and suffering from almost every known disease. Their death rate at this time was about sixty a day. For the next two months the stream of refugees continued steadily until about the end of October when some 40,000 people had been accommodated in E.P. tents and mat-shelters. Later this number was increased to about 45,000. The whole camp which covers roughly an area of one square mile, was divided into three areas, "A," "B" and "C" respectively. Each of these areas was subdivided into sections, varying from 11 to 13 in number in each area. Over each area there was a British officer, and each section had a British officer looking after it, assisted by 3 or 4 British soldiers. These personnel were responsible for the cleanliness, welfare and discipline of their section. Each section had

roughly 50 E.P. tents accommodating approximately 1250 persons, its own chlorinated water supply pumped from the river, latrines, incinerators and cooking sheds. Thus the camp had a series of self-contained tented villages.

As a result of the diseased condition of the refugees on their arrival here, every man, woman and child had to pass through a disinfecting area before being allowed to proceed to an open section. Hospitals were erected quickly to cope with the disease from which the people were suffering at this time. The difficult question of feeding the people was met by a large Supply Depot fed from Baghdad being opened alongside the Baghdad-Table Mountain railway which runs through the camp. Rations were issued in bulk to Area Commanders, from them to sections and to tent representatives.

A bazaar was opened in October 1918, which was promptly filled by refugee shopkeepers who did flourishing trade. About the same time an orphanage was started, and some 800 Armenian and Assyrian orphans accommodated.

Close to 3,000 E.P. tents were issued and pitched for the refugees, all mat-shelters having of necessity to be replaced by these, on account of the winter. These tents were issued by a Quartermaster's Store which was opened in the camp shortly after its commencement, many thousands of blankets, garmets and other kind of clothes, were also issued to the people. The American Mission also supplied huge quantities of clothing, etc.

### **Administration of the Camp**

When the refugees first arrived here, it was impossible to divide and separate them into their tribes and divisions immediately. Accordingly, for the first month or so, the people were all mixed up, Armenians and Assyrians together. But as they became more settled, a census was held, and the people were arranged throughout the sections according to their tribal divisions and affiliations. In "A" area, all the Armenians were located, in "B" area the majority of the mountaineer Assyrians, and in "C" area the remainder of the latter, and the Urmia Assyrians. In an annex to one section, the Patriarchal family and some of the Maliks and Chieftains of the nation were placed, whilst one section was set apart for the wealthy and aristocratic members of the Armenians and Assyrians.

During the first part of the year's administration, the main difficulties were in obtaining and maintaining labour, and in teaching the people sanitation, and how to keep free from disease. This was a difficult business and necessitated constant medical supervision and hard work, especially during winter.

### **Education**

About Christmas 1918, schools were opened.

English as well was taught and extraordinary good progress was made by the children, who eagerly rushed to learn their benefactor's language. About the same time, the American Persian Relief Commission, who were given permission to reside in the camp and help with relief work, opened a school and accommodated many hundreds of children. Schools were also opened in the Orphanage, and were administered by Assyrian and Armenian teachers. These schools were greatly appreciated by the Assyrians and Armenians, and all the children being tremendously eager to learn the languages were extremely quick at learning. There were more than 3,000 students in the schools. My father, Rabie Yacob Zia Yacob, was appointed Principal of all the schools, and assistant to Lieutenant W. E. Shimmin, the Education Officer.

### **Religion**

To cope with the many sects among the refugees, special tents were allotted to each sect for the purpose of carrying out their religious rites. Almost all the Armenians were Gregorians, the remainder being Roman Catholic or Presbyterians. The mountaineer Assyrians belonged to the Church of the East, while the Urmian Assyrians, for the most part, were members of the Russian Orthodox Church and the remainder being Presbyterians. The Presbyterians among the refugees attended services at the American Mission compound in the camp. The Armenians held their services in "A" area; the members of the Church of the East in tents allotted to them in the Patriarchal annex; the Orthodox and Roman Catholics, likewise in reserved tents; all under their own clergy. No internal religious strife had arisen and no preferential treatment having been given to any one sect.

### **The Internal Administration of the People**

For the administration of the internal affairs of the people, concerning all matters connected with their customs and national life, the British decided not to interfere. Committees consisting of representatives of the people were elected. One committee to represent all the Armenians in the camp, consisting of nine members and headed by a priest of the Gregorian Church, was elected to deal with Armenian affairs. A committee called the Mountaineer and Patriarchal Committee, afterwards changed to the National Assyrian Committee, with the Patriarch as its head was appointed.

Each tribe had its Maliks or Raises representative on this committee. A subcommittee of this National Committee was elected for the Urmian Assyrians, with representatives of northern, central and southern Urmia as its members. The duties of these committees were the settling of legal and

other disputes between the people; questions of national customs and religious duties, and all other questions relative to their internal life. They acted as the official organ and mouthpiece to the British Administration in everything concerning the welfare, the past and the future of the people. They had put their confidence and hope in the British administration. And although the longing for their fatherland was so strongly implanted in them that it had led some of them into trouble; they realized the difficulties standing in the way of their repatriation to their homelands and accepted the decisions and orders of the British administration, philosophically and willingly.

The question of repatriating the refugees to their former homes and the political situation and problems will be the subject of another paper, in continuation of this article.

## ON THE ASSYRIANS OF TODAY

*A Commentary*

by **Abram George**

In our Holy Bible we read:

Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of a high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all the great nations.

In those glowing words the sublime Hebrew Prophet, Ezekiel, gives us a portrait of our noble ancestors of Nineveh — those mighty men who built the world's first great Empire, and who in their "laboratories" in Bet-Nahrain (Mesopotamia) developed and refined the civilization that our modern world enjoys.

Now I ask, just precisely how do we, the Assyrians of today, compare with those immortal forefathers of ours? My reply: They were mighty giants; we're mere puny pygmies. They were powerful eagles; we're wingless fowl. In their shadow dwelled the nations of the world; in the shadow of the nations of the world we exist. The deep and dark tragedy of all this is that we're wholly contented in

being puny pygmies, wingless fowl, and dwellers in the shadows.

Why are we satisfied to exist in our sorry state, in our pitiful plight? The examples below hold the answer: An elderly Assyrian gentleman told me, "Following my graduation from high school, I asked my kinfolk to send me to college. My request angered them. Yelled my maternal uncle, "Boy, you're a man now. Roll up your sleeves and go and work like a man, make money, get married. Only lazy, good-for-nothing young men keep on going to school." He poured a bucket of water on my flame of ambition. All my life I've lived in my ignorance, not knowing anything about life, about the world around me, about the different people of the world."

At an Assyrian convention I approached one of our famous singers and said, "Young lady, with your impressive stature, attractive personality, and magnificent voice, you could become a great opera singer, bringing fame to our people." She seemed offended by what I said. Abruptly, she said, "I'm an Assyrian. I'll sing for Assyrians."

One day I stopped one of our popular band leaders to tell him, "Our Assyrian bands ought to get together to develop a super band, with super singers and dancers to perform on the stages of London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and other cities of the world. Let all the world's people know we Assyrians are very much alive. Don't you think this is a good idea?" "Mamoo (uncle), just wait here," he said. "I'll take my banjo to my car. Then I'll be back to talk to you about what you told me." I watched him go to his car, get behind the wheel and drive off.

At a picnic in Turlock, I ran into a well-known Assyrian writer. I said to him, "Sir, why don't you have your writings translated into different languages. If you do that, you'll be telling the many kinds of people in our world that our Assyrian presence is still existing in the different lands. And this, too: You'll be getting a good income from the sales. With that income you'll be able to help thousands of our needy people" What I suggested upset the man. In an angry tone of voice he said, "I'm a man with a strong national spirit ("rookha d'milet.") If I allow that to happen, I'll be betraying my people. My writings must be kept in our own language."

Here's what one of our Assyrian physicians told me: "In my profession, I'm a man of success, respected by my colleagues and trusted by my patients. Financially I'm sound and secure, and well-known in my community. And I always believed that I was fully educated. But now, in my fifties, I see things differently. In my high school, college, and medical school years I pursued only those studies that would help me to become successful in the medical field, and to earn a good income that would meet all my needs in the physical world. I wholly shunned all those courses that



would help me to become a full and fulfilled human being. Yes, in my early years it made no sense to me to study literature, history, philosophy, languages and cultures of the different world peoples. For this reason today I regard myself as an ill-educated and ill-cultivated individual." There were tears in his eyes as he made this confession.

At one of our Assyrian churches I heard one of our priests preach thus: "God knows, you know, and I know we're human beings. As human beings, we have mistakes, faults, shortcomings, even sins. Don't let these things bother you. God is a loving and forgiving God." This kind of preaching is in direct contrast to the teachings of our Lord Jesus, I say. Jesus didn't tell the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, "You are only human. Keep living in your mistakes and sins, and I'll keep forgiving you." No! Jesus did not talk that way to her. He said, "Woman, I forgive you this time. But go and sin no more." Here's what Jesus is teaching us: "You people, be wise, be honest, be pure, live righteously and without any guilt, and be perfect like your Father in Heaven. Only then will you qualify to become the bright light and aromatic seasoning of your world communities." I say living is one of the fine arts. If violinists, pianists, and opera singers can become masters of their art, why can't we become masters of our art — the Art of Living? I maintain we CAN bring excellence, even perfection in our daily living!

For over a score of centuries we, the Assyrians, have concealed ourselves in the shadow of the world's nations. The time is here and now that we emerge from our hiding place, and appear on the international scene. Here are the guidelines that will enable us to accomplish such a noble task for ourselves:

I couldn't, I refused to believe my eyes when for the first time I saw a single orchard tree on its several branches bearing different kinds of fruit. How did this happen? I learned this nature's miracle, this phenomenon was wrought through the science of grafting. Let's "graft" ourselves to our human family tree so that we may become a productive bough whose yield will delight us, our neighbors, and our Father in Heaven.

In many countries where we live, the doors of opportunity are wide open to us. In the freedom afforded us, we can acquire a well-balanced and fully-rounded education that will ignite our intellect and illumine our minds. And then, by utilizing the God-endowed powers, resources, capacities, and talents of our nature we'll be able to fully develop ourselves physically, socially, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. It will follow, then, that we'll become celebrities and stars in our own eyes as well as in the eyes of the people among whom we dwell.

Yes, when we've elevated ourselves to the HIGH

DIMENSION OF LIFE, the world populations will begin to notice, respect, and honor us. And, moreover, they'll join us as we fight on in order that we reclaim our original homeland in Bet-Nahrain (Mesopotamia). Then, behold, our day of triumph! And then, behold, the rebirth of Assyria — A DRAPED-IN-GRANDEUR AND GARBED-IN-GLORY ASSYRIA!

## TWO SAN JOSE ORGANIZATIONS UNITE

December 15, 1991 was a very happy occasion for the Assyrians living in San Jose, California, and the surrounding areas, as the two organizations, the Assyrian American Association and the Assyrian Community Center, united to form one organization, as it was originally.

A meeting was held for this purpose in the Mar Yosip Church Hall in San Jose, attended by members of the organizations as well as others. Guests of Honor were: Mar Bawai Soro, Bishop for the Western United States of the Church of the East; Rev. Samuel Dinkha, priest of Mar Yosip Church of the East, San Jose; Rev. Youshia Sunaa, priest of the Mart Maryam Assyrian Chaldean Catholic Church; Rev. Fraidon Ishaq, minister of the Assyrian Evangelical Church of San Jose; and Ashur Yonan, president of the Assyrian American National Federation.

Mar Bawai, speaking to this gathering, gave encouragement, hope and his blessings to this endeavor. He stressed that this was not just unity between two organizations but a unity and spiritual bond of brotherhood between Assyrian families. He hoped that this action would serve as an example for groups in other cities to follow. He concluded by expressing his pleasure with this event and bestowed his blessings for its success.

Mr. Ashur Yonan, in his talk, was very pleased with the unity of these organizations which are members of the National Federation. He expressed the hope that the Federation and its affiliates would be able to help this organization acquire a building for an educational center.

The presidents of the two former organizations, Mr. George Zia and Mr. Carlo Ganja, in turn spoke about how the idea of unity developed and how it was promoted through joint discussions, meetings and activities. Temporarily, Mr. Zia is president and Mr. Ganja vice-president. At the end of the meeting the 300 people present expressed their happiness at the results and the warm feelings between each other.

The Assyrian Foundation congratulates the two San Jose organizations for forming a single organization to serve the needs of the community.

# AGHA PETROS DE BAZ (1880-1932)

by Solomon S. Solomon

In the year 653 B.C. the Assyrian King Ashur Banipal led his army to victory over the Elamites in a devastating campaign that left the land of Elam in ruin. It was the last great victory in the long history of the empire. Ashur Banipal was to be the last great commander of the Assyrian army. The empire was to fall within a few decades. It took another 25 centuries before a commander of the caliber of Ashur Banipal was to emerge in the land of Atur. That man Petros Eleow, is better known to us as Agha Petros De Baz.



Being a collector of medals and a member of the orders and medals society of America, I took great interest in the photos of the General in his uniforms and wearing his many decorations; and in his most famous photo, wearing a full dress uniform. I was able to identify some decoration and honors bestowed upon him from many nations. Here are some of them:

France:

The order of the Legion of Honor. The Palmes Academique, The Cross of War with palm.

Tzarist Russia:

The order of St. Stanislas. The Cross of St. George. The Medal of St. George.

Belgium:

The Royal Order of the Lion. The Commander's Cross, and The Breast Stars, are hard to identify. The badge below the medals is of Russian type.

During the dark days following the surrender of the British army in Kut, the collapse of the Russian army following the October, 1917, revolution, and the murder of Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun in Koni Shar, it was the generalship of Agha Petros that saved the Assyrian nation from utter destruction by Turks, Persians, and Kurds. He delivered the nation safely to the refugee camp in Baquba only to become discredited by the British.

The following is a short biography of Assyria's greatest military hero in modern times. Much of the following information was provided to the author by the Assyrian poet and author Ninos Nirary of Baz, who is in the process of writing a book about the life of Agha Petros.

Assyria's greatest military hero was born in Mata Khtita in the Tribe of Baz in Hakkiari, on April 1, 1880. While in the village, he studied in the American School. Later on, he continued his studies in the Catholic Missionary School in Urmia, and earned a diploma. It was then that he started work as an assistant in the Ottoman Consulate in Urmia. Later on, he married Zarifa Khanim, the daughter of the Deputy Consul. Agha Petros became the Ottoman Consul in Urmia, upon the death of David Rasam.

While serving in his new position, he used his influence to help the Christian population of the area to a degree that the Pope sent him a medal as a token of gratitude.

Once the war started, he resigned his position to help his nation. He saw much fighting in the years 1915-1918 under the command of the Russians, earning him the Saint George Cross. But his true military genius did not surface until the collapse of the Russian army, and the subsequent murder of the Patriarch Mar Benyamin. Agha Petros, with the help of Rab Khaila David, was able to defeat numerous Persian, Kurdish, and Turkish armies, until the British army informed him to meet them in Saen Kala. It was during the retreat from Urmia to Hamadan, that his generalship saved the Assyrian nation from utter destruction. Once in the refugee camp in Baquba, it became apparent that the British had different aims for the nation from his. So it was that when he commanded an Assyrian army north to reconquer Hakkiari, the British would not support him, and the expedition failed. By then the rift was complete, and the general had to leave the new nation of Iraq. Later on, his efforts did not bear any fruit at the Paris Peace Conference. So he went to his adopted country of France, where he died on

February 2, 1932. He left behind a large family.

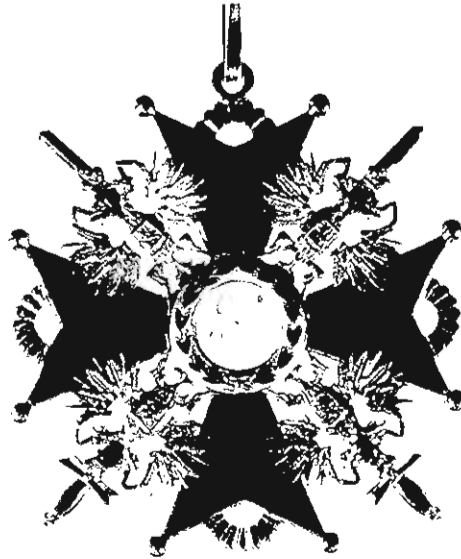
His younger brother Agha Mirza, had to leave the village of Mata Khtita in Baz at a young age and seek refuge with his brother Agha Petros after being involved in an accident in the village, in which the son of Reverend Daniel of Baz was killed.

*Agha Petros De Baz*

Agha Mirza was always at the side of his brother until he was killed in an ambush between Mosul and Tel-Keif village in 1921. He was buried in the Jacobite Church of Mar Ishaya in Mosul. May they both rest in peace.



*Legion of Honor*



*Order of St. Stanislas*



*Cross of St. George*



*Medal of St. George*



*Palme Academique*



*Cross of War*

*Some of the Decorations of Agha Petros*

# ASSYRIANS

## In The Siberian Exile — 1949-1956 — Memories

by Iliya L. Vartanov

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

Abridged version especially for *Nineveh Magazine*.

*This book is dedicated to my sisters Marta, 18, and Elza, 16, and to hundreds of innocent Assyrians who died in Siberia of cold, hunger and other tortures.*

### CHAPTER VII

#### **Correctional process through: Forced labor, taxation, songs and posters. Release from Siberia.**

Dear reader, we are getting close to the end of our story. In previous chapters 1 through 6 (see *Nineveh* No. 3 and 4, 1990; Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, 1991) a hidden history of exile of the Assyrian minority to Siberia had been described stage by stage. Three pieces of digression were made to the past of the Assyrian people so that a reader could picture the background of today's Assyrians, especially of those who lived under the Soviet Communist regime from 1917. It is known that the ancient history of our Aramaic speaking people is incredibly full with oppressions, persecutions and cruelty towards Assyrians; however, all this is more or less understandable in the context of "dark ages" and of the times of barbarianism. But a cruel, cold blooded crime that the government of the Soviet Union committed against the defenseless minority in the second half of the 20th century seems to be absolutely illogical and more, beyond our readers' imaginations. The authorities managed to keep that crime secret for decades. Dr. Ulf Bjorklund, Professor-Anthropologist of the University of Stockholm (Sweden) says "I've read the chapter that was recently published in *Nineveh*. It is shocking, of course, because even if we had known about Stalin's terror for a long time, until recently we, in the West, did not know that it hit the Assyrians too." The following pages will tell you more about what means the authorities used in order to correct "guilty people," such as the Assyrians.

#### **Forced labor as correctional means . . .**

The forced "correctional" labor was considered in the zone as a main means used to "educate" exiled people in the "right way." Assyrians obeyed all zone regulations unquestioningly. All works were hard to do, but the hardest work was stubbing and rooting trees out in order to make new sown areas; Siberia needed them badly. People literally fought against forests to conquer additional lands. The labor was totally manual because of lack of machinery; there was none available. All that the people possessed were their own toil-hardened hands, saws, axes and ropes. First, people had to fell a gigantic tree — its stem might be as thick as two grasps of both arms — then they had to hack it in pieces and carry them away. The zone had lack of horses, therefore, people used ropes to drag out heavy logs; ten strong men together

could be substituted for one horse. The hardest part of the job was digging the roots of the trees out of the ground. Women did the same jobs as men, there were no differences between sexes. Teenagers collected branches and wood chips and burned them. Finally, workers used shovels to fill the huge holes and thus one more acre of land was ready to be sown. Therefore, many fields of today's agricultural Siberia are a kind of "monument" that was built up by the hands of the Assyrian who were in exile.

There were several different forced labor jobs, such as: Working in fields, animal farms, grain elevators and others as well. People were paid next to nothing for their hard work, and were given enough food just to survive. This was slavery, and the State was the owner. It was not in the State's economic interest to let the labor force die. The State paid the exiled working people a very small amount of money, just enough to buy shoes and necessary clothing.

Here is a description of the job which was called tree-felling and timber-rafting. The timber enterprise was located as far as 200 miles, near a large river called Podolsk. The State needed wood and timber, and the more they had, the better.

The working season started in the winter, as the ground was frozen; in summer numerous swamps and rivers made it impossible for any movement. Woodcutters carried cut stems up to the banks of frozen rivers, and in summer, as the rivers became floatable, they started timber-rafting. Logs and stems were floating down the rivers; somewhere, hundreds of miles away, it was collected for milling. This was distributed to various industries to make furniture, matches, paper, etc. The paper was used to make notebooks and textbooks for the State public schools. The Soviet schoolboys and girls of kindergarten level up to 12th grade would read in those textbooks that their country was the most free, happy and democratic one on the globe; they felt proud of their great homeland, and they, of course, never realized that these very textbooks had been made by using forced labor.

Tree-felling jobs were both very hard and risky. Every single Assyrian family was obliged to give one worker to do that job. Woodcutters, men as well as women, were "drafted," and prepared themselves to leave for the entire winter. The night before they would gather together, sing, dance, tell jokes, laugh and drink vodka. Early in the morning they would leave on sledges accompanied by two guards. They would be settled in barracks,

separating men from the women. For the next six months this was their home. Their food consisted of a piece of bread, tea, frozen milk, which the wood cutters used to melt and mix with mashed potatoes.

Woodcutters worked in pairs. Armed with axes and manual saws — the first power saws appeared in our area a few years afterwards — they would enter the forest and choose a tree to be cut. These were gigantic trees 120 to 130 feet tall and even taller. The slope and the angle of incidence of the tree was examined. The price of mistake was too high — the wood cutter's life itself. The falling giant tree would smash anything in its path. Sometimes, suddenly the trajectory of its fall would change causing injuries and sometimes death, as it happened to one of our distant relatives, Pattee, son of Marooguel and some other unlucky people. Therefore, as a safeguard, the two wood cutters would tread a 30-40 foot path (everyone on his/her side) in very deep snow reaching up to a man's waist, so that a woodcutter could run away or aside in case a tree would fall on him/her.

Late in the evening, dead tired, the woodcutters would return to their barracks, eat their supper and fall asleep on their plank beds, sometimes in their working clothes. From a distance, one couldn't tell a man from a woman as all wore the same rough padded jackets, caps with earflaps, rough cotton padded pants, and Siberian "vahlenki," i.e., kind of winter felt boots. Each morning the routine begins all over again, daily, monthly and yearly.

In those years, women were considered as a forced labor equal to men. Here I am holding in my hands a unique certificate given to my older sister, Anna (who was lucky to survive) by the authorities:

**Certificate No. 9**  
**Date: October 26, 1952**

Zakharov regional tree-falling enterprise management hereby certifies that Ms. Anna Vartanov, born in 1929, accomplished successfully the full program training as a woodcutter. Ms. Anna Vartanov has been awarded qualification of skilled wood-cutter and she is allowed to do all jobs related to this profession.

Engineer of the enterprise: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Chief Manager of the enterprise: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Seal of the enterprise

Similar certificates were given to other Assyrian women. Many of them still have that document in their possession. This is what I am thinking about: Even in primitive society, some 7-10 thousand years ago, there were regulations that differentiated functions of men and women, i.e., as the men of the tribe went mammoth hunting, the women stayed home to "maintain the fire." In our Soviet society, the authorities put axes and saws in the hands of women and forced them to go "mammoth hunting," i.e., to get in wild and sub-freezing Siberian forests and do tree-falling jobs. This type of work required good health and physical strength that many men were not physically fit to do, let alone women.

**Taxation policy as correctional means . . .**

As I mentioned above, the Assyrians suffered from

hunger in the first few years of the Exile. One can hardly picture any harsher life conditions than ours. All adults had to perform forced labor almost for nothing. So, what else could be required from these poor people? Contrary to common sense, the exiled people had to pay several different taxes in two ways: In money as well as in natural products.

My father said: We had to pay the State "income tax" rate up to 13%. Young people, after they reached 18, regardless of whether they were married or not, had to pay the State a special tax called "the childlessness tax" and it was to be paid in cash. A married couple might not have a child just because they were infertile, and were taxed for this misfortune. If a married couple had just one child, the tax would be reduced by half, i.e., 50%, but still remained and was called "scarcity of children income tax." I guess the State needed the labor force, labor hands, the more the better, and such tax policies were widely used as stimulation. People got free of that tax only if they gave birth to two children.

One who raised a cow was obligated to pay 300 rubles per year to the State, and 120 rubles per year for raising a pig. However, if you decided to slaughter your cow, pig or calf, you had to give the skin to the State, otherwise you would pay a big fine. An owner of a cow had to give 125 gallons of milk and more (depending on fat content) to the State per year. Other tax payments, paid annually by every single family, were 35 pounds of butter, 120 eggs and 8 pounds of wool. If you did not raise any animals, you had to buy these products elsewhere and bring them to the State "collecting department."

There was also one more means of extracting money from the people. In those years, the Soviet government issued the so-called "State Economic Development Loan Bonds." It was senseless to get them because you merely would lose your money in that way; no wonder the government act was very unpopular among people. On the other hand, it appeared to be a "voluntary" decision — to get or not to get State Loan Bonds, but in fact, every single family was being forced to buy Loan Bonds equivalent to 10% of their yearly income. The money was never refunded. In fact, this was a kind of indirect income tax in addition to the 13% official income tax.

Assyrians in the exile obeyed all orders and regulations. However, all of them could not afford getting State Loan Bonds because of the fact that they had to feed their children and take care of their needs. The officers and agents who were in charge of selling the State Loan Bonds thought otherwise. Those who had not gotten the bonds were to report to the Zone Administration office in order to make them better understand the Soviet State needs.

My father was unable to buy any State Loan Bonds, therefore he was the one who "owed" money to the State the most. The Zone's bosses were angry with him; and in their view, people who didn't buy State Loan Bonds were not patriotic and not loyal to the Soviet Union. One frosty winter day, while my father was working at the animal farm, he was told to report to the Zone office. He got over there right away as he was, in dirty clothes with a strong scent of silage that he brought to the farm on sledges. Small icicles covered his moustache, eyelashes and his eyebrows were whitened by the snow. The very first question was asked of my father when he appeared

through the door was "Hey, Lazar, did you bring money for getting State Bonds?" the local officer Shoovahyev said. "I didn't," my father responded. "I am out of money, but if you wish, I can bring you a sledge full of silage."

A few people burst into laughter when hearing such a promise to the local chief Communist Shoovahyev, who by his appearance looked like a rich landlord, and on the other hand, my poor father, who looked just like a peasant worker in old pre-revolutionary Russia, personified so vividly and classically a social contrast that the situation got theatrical.

The chief got angry and said, "Hey you, I am talking about money, got it? Did you bring the money?" My father bent toward the direction of the chief and replied with a humble, submissive tone, "If you like, pick my head up, because I don't have any money." "You are teasing me!" shouted the chief. "Well, I'm going to teach you a good lesson."

He called "Comrade Shevtsov (one of our guards) who had a pistol on his hip. The chief addressed my father once again, "This is the last time I am asking you, either you buy State Loan Bonds or else!" My father replied, "For how much money should I buy Bonds?" Comrade Shevtsov responded, "For a minimum of 12,000 rubles." My father replied, "Don't you want me to buy Bonds for 12 million rubles?" Shoovahyev immediately reacted on that sarcastic reply. "You, you know who you are?" He roared, "You are an American hanger-on!" At that moment my father lost his patience and replied, "You, you yourself are an American hanger-on! I am an average worker. Every day, regardless of the weather conditions, I take a silage to the farm to keep the animals alive while you are riding your motorcycle, here and there, just for your pleasure!" Shoovahyev turned around with his red-colored face and said, "I promise you, I will force you to perform your duty and buy Loan Bonds, as I do to all the other farmers." "Come on," my father said indifferently, "pick up all of what I currently possess." Then, Shoovahyev turned his head to the Zone's bookkeeper and asked, "What does this nut have on his account?" The bookkeeper replied, "There are 00 rubles, 00 kopecks left on his account, and besides, he has 5 children under 16, and for the last six months he has borrowed food to feed them." "I don't care about that," replied Shoovahyev, who was still red-faced with anger. "Comrade Shevtsov," he said, "try to explain to that Lazar Vartanov that his behavior is not loyal to our State."

The Zone guard Shevtsov was a good natured man. He stepped up to my father, put his hand on my father's shoulder and said, "Listen, Lazar, just try to understand that we should help our State, we simply all have to. You take care of your family, but the State's concern is about the needs of the whole population of our country. The money collected from selling State Loan Bonds will go to build new schools, hospitals, kindergartens, as well as strengthening the defense power of our homeland. Understand? Okay. I see right now that you are out of money, but in about a month from now you will receive your yearly income, which is partly in cash. Will you then buy State Loan Bonds?" My father went on and on with his stubborn self and said "I can't afford it. Are you going to feed my children?" Then Shevtsov stepped away and said, "I can't help it, this man is not aware of our State's plans." The Zone chief, Shoovahyev, was extremely

angry, he grabbed my father's collar and pushed him with all his force to the door and said, "Get out of here! I have yet to show you!" But he failed to fulfill his threat, because in a short period of time unexpected events changed the lives of both inmates and their guards.

I'll come back to this a little later.

### **Songs and posters as correctional means . . .**

Believe it or not, the Administration of our correctional Zone did take care of our "re-education" and having us returned to the "right way of behaving."

First, the radios in our meager houses were turned on by an outside operator in the power station whenever Moscow began broadcasts of the Party's speeches. Then all the households were given a variety of political posters that were to be hung on walls, to serve as a "visual propaganda," aimed for the same purpose of "correction." I recall one of these posters picturing a loathsome face and figure of "Uncle Sam," and the sign, "the major enemy of the proletariat is International Imperialism and its leader — the U.S.A.!" (Then, we didn't understand that a major enemy of all people was settled in the Kremlin and governed the country.) The other poster hung over the corner of my head, where I slept all seven years of my exile. A good "sample" of the Soviet citizen watched me sternly, his face got twisted and distorted with a strong patriotic anger and he warned me, as the sign said, "A big talker is a godsend for spies!" At that time the spying mania was dominating all the country, and agents of "Imperialism's Intelligence Services" seemed to the Soviet authorities to be hidden under every single bed. My Siberian childhood passed, literally speaking, under that anti-spying poster slogan.

Another "correctional process" was called "Holiday of Songs." It was really a good enjoyable holiday. After having finished all harvest-picking jobs in the fields, which usually occurred in September, all the exiled people were to be brought to the town of Bakhchar for one Sunday. This town used to be an administrative center of our correctional zones, and all the executive services and authorities were located over there. Early in the morning at around 4:00 a.m. we left for Bakhchar which was 25 miles away. We were brought there by cars harnessed with horses. We travelled together: adults, children, senior citizens and, of course, our guards. Nobody wanted to miss such a scarce chance, which happened once a year, to visit a "real town" (I guess it wasn't a real town), to walk on its remarkable wooden-made sidewalks, to do various shopping, to drink bright-red colored, fizzy cranberry water named "mors"; in other words, to have plenty of fun. We all were in a very good mood on that day of the year, it's true!

However, the performances by talented amateurs, were in focus. There was a large open stage and a big sign "The Mass-Propaganda Center." A chorus of singers stepped up on the stage, accompanied by accordion players playing music, and the exiled people singing. Thousands of spectators watched these performances. The songs were a great deal different from those they sang when doing field jobs and on their way home late in the evenings. These were pro-Soviet patriotic, "educational" songs, officially approved to be sung in the country. The Zone's chief did check the list of songs that were to be

sung, before the singers left for Bakhchar. Some of these songs were superficial and even silly, but people sang them sincerely, because they really wanted to sing. This was a voluntary thing. Some of the other songs seemed to be political declarations and ideological mottoes of the Communist Party rather than real songs. Here is the refrain of the then political songs that I cite literally below. The exiled amateur singers sang loudly, like this:

“Moscow and Peking!  
Moscow and Peking!  
The two people are advancing ahead!  
We are for a lightful world!  
We are for a Peaceful world,  
Flourishing under our red banner,  
That is Banner of the Freedom!”

I recall another refrain from the song about Soviet-Chinese friendship, and was repeatedly sung:

“Stalin and Mao\*  
Are listening to us!  
Are listening to us!  
Are listening to us!”

\*Mao Tse-Tung (1893-1976) then Chinese Communist leader and Chairman of the People's Republic of China.

People on the stage sang or rather shouted those words so convincingly that nobody doubted for a minute that our favorite leaders really listened to them and heard whatever people sang in the two countries. There were crews of performers from every single Zone. The concert lasted for 4-5 hours, but the large crowd applauded vividly and nibbled on fried sunflower seeds. Numerous supervisors and different ranked chiefs of our correctional zones were seated in special rows as guests of honor. Like the other people, they listened and watched and they seemed to be happy. They apparently liked the multi-voiced chorus of the people of the Siberian special zones, and probably felt deeply satisfied at the thought that these exiled people were getting the “right socialist consciousness” in the correctional zones. Anyway, each side was satisfied for its own reasons at this holiday of songs.

### **Release from Siberia. Excused, but not equated . . .**

As I said above, our Zone's chief Shoovahyev threatened my father “to show” him, but failed to do that because something very important happened and affected things all around the country. For us, it meant a turning point in our lives. It began like this: One day in March of 1953, as usual, the children came to school (I was in the second grade), but the school bell didn't ring and the teachers didn't start lessons. Instead of classes, we were told to get in line in the hallway. We did, all students along with the teachers waited for about half an hour until the principal, Pohloektov, came and faced our lines. He was a communist, and was exiled here and nobody knew what he was guilty of. He was a tall, strong, huge man, but at that moment he seemed physically diminished and looked very miserable. After a long pause, he said “Children . . .,” and we became shaken with his trembling and weakened voice. “Children . . ., the most terrible and irreversible tragedy has happened; he died . . ., he died . . .” He failed to finish his sentence; he tried to dry his tears, his face twisted because of an unbearable grief, and suddenly turned around and went

away. We all got scared and understood nothing. Then, the school counselor, Anastasiya Ihvanovna, said what the principal couldn't. “Children,” she said aloud, “yesterday our dearly beloved leader and teacher comrade Stalin . . . died. Go back home, no classes today.”

We couldn't believe it. Joseph Stalin was an immortal giant, everyone could die at his time but Stalin . . . My father, remembering Siberia many years after the exile, told me he learned 24 hours earlier than others that Stalin had died. Early in the morning I went to work, he said. I was riding a sledge, and a young man Youkhana Bet Daniel ran into me and shouted, “Hey, uncle Lazar, slow down, I've got a 'shikhda' (Assyrian: “good news”).” My father stopped the horse and sledge. “Tell me if you aren't kidding.” “Not at all, uncle Lazar,” and then he whispered in his ear, “My wife Doosya worked night shift today and she is a telephone operator, and she received a strictly secret cable for local authorities. Listen, uncle Lazar, it's unbelievable. . . Stalin . . . died! I just beg you not to tell this to anybody, otherwise I'll be banished or punished.” The news affected me, my father recalled, as if lightning struck me . . . and we adults —continued my father — couldn't realize the death of that great and terrible man until all local newspapers appeared the next day with his portrait in a large black frame.

This event encouraged the exiled Assyrians to start again writing letters to Moscow's Soviet authorities, in which they begged to reexamine their “case” and to release them. Two more years passed. In the spring of 1956, a few Assyrians were ordered to go to Bakhchar, and there, in the region department of the Interior Ministry they were officially informed that “Moscow made a decision to release them from special correctional zones.” You are allowed to go back to Caucasia or voluntarily stay here, they were told. You had been accustomed to this area for these many years, you possess your own houses and you are very good workers, so think about what to do.

To stay here?! To think about this?! Crazy suggestion! All these seven years, days and nights, the Assyrians dreamed about their Caucasia, and now they didn't want to delay it for one more minute or day. “We will immediately leave for Caucasia,” they responded. All the population of our zone of Porotnikovo got extremely agitated as the first Assyrians came back from Bakhchar with appropriate papers of release in their hands. This was a miracle! We, or course, didn't yet know that there, far away, in “the big world,” the famous (now) 20th Party conference was held, and new country leader Khrushchev got started unmaking Stalin's cult of personality and began the campaign for rehabilitation of numerous innocent victims of Stalin's repressive regime.

There came the day as the first Assyrian families left for Caucasia. After years of despair and hopelessness, we felt their departure as a dream and not as a reality. There the happy released people shake the hands of hundreds of others who still have to stay here. There they get up in a big truck with all their belongings, there the trucks started to move in the direction of the city of Tomsk, and from Tomsk the railroads will drive them up to the very Caucasia! We tried to picture their road back to beautiful Caucasia, but this was almost beyond our imagination. And we also were scared a great deal, that the release

wouldn't come up to us. However, new developments were irreversible. Every week, one more group of Assyrians got called to the Administrative Center of Zones — Bakhchar — where they were given necessary papers and documents for settlement in new places. At last our turn came up. We got released, we were free! But getting back to Caucasia was not a simple thing. We were taken to Siberia, so to say, at the State's expense, although in freight cars, and now we had to pay for our 10,000 mile trip, which was costly to us. We started preparations for distant travel. We made an enormous quantity of dried crusts from rye bread, and provided ourselves with the proper quantity of sugar and tea — such were our main meals. We sold our cow named "Lyub" for 1,800 rubles and our house for 3,500 rubles — this was all our money to start a new life. What we left in the house were three or four simple, worthless stools, a few wooden plank beds, a huge Russian stove, "Pechka," and soiled with smoke four walls on which some political posters were left hanging, including the one warning not to talk a lot because "there were many spies" around us. And, the most important, we left forever three hillocks, three members of our family in the frozen Siberian ground.

Like other released Assyrians, we got the Main Document, document #1, i.e., official written certification of our release. In the 1970s, I made a copy of this unique document, and here is its translation, word for word:

Supreme Court  
Union of the Soviet  
Socialist Republics  
September 17, 1956  
No. 02-8785-C-54

### Certificate

This document is given to citizen Lazar Vartanov, born in 1895, to certify that on April 16, 1955, the Supreme Court Department of Criminal Cases made a decision to abolish the resolution of November 12, 1949, adopted by the Special Consultative Group under the Committee of the State Security (KGB), on the basis of which he was sentenced to the exile. Citizen Lazar Vartanov released from the special correctional zone.

Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R.  
Chairman: Yefremov: (Signature)  
Assistant Chairman: Morozov: (Signature)  
Seal

A similar document was given to every family member 18 years and older. Pay attention, dear readers, to a specific thing: This document refers to November 12, 1949 when the decision concerning the Assyrian people, sentenced to exile, was approved by top authorities. Actually, we were caught and taken away to Siberia four months earlier, in June, and this is a fact. How can that contradiction be clarified? I thought about that, and discussed the subject with the elderly Assyrians. Our guess was that when special troops of the KGB were given orders to surround the Assyrian population all around Caucasia, they still didn't have any written sanction of the Soviet Government, they just had an approval signed by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan — Baguirov — and by the chief of the regional KGB. In those years, two persons holding these two high positions in any area, could change the destiny of any

people and minority. Since there wasn't yet an approval of Moscow for this operation, i.e., night capture of Assyrians, we, thousands of innocents, were carried away, as any contraband goods, on railroads that were distant from Moscow and other large administrative centers of Russia. Besides, we were carried in closed freight cars, and mainly at night time, so that this criminal action was kept secret. Then, to justify this crime and to provide it a lawful appearance, First Secretary Baguirov through his friend Beria, who was then chief of the KGB, held in Moscow a special session of the Supreme Court; the defendant, i.e., the Assyrian people, was absent! But nevertheless, a decision was made. The members of the Supreme Court probably didn't even know that the people for which they approved a sentence to exile had already been in the Siberian exile for four months! What a time, what a regime. . . Such were my thoughts caused by the difference between the two dates: the 13th of June 1949 (night capture and exile) and the 12th of November (day of making that crime "legal"). As to the highly ranked criminals: Beria, Baguirov and their friends, they were arrested and sentenced to death immediately after Khrushchev came to power and started his campaign against the cult of personality (i.e., cult of Stalin). Millions of innocent people were released from concentration camps. This preceded our own release from Siberia.

We were very anxious to get to our homes in Caucasia. I leave out the description of our route. This time we traveled via Moscow and took much time and it was very difficult for all of us. We went on passenger cars. Eventually we reached the railroad station Akstahfa, the same one where we were brought on trucks in the night over seven years before! A few miles distance from there is our home village — Greenfield. We couldn't believe it, we felt as if this was a dream.

At last we came to our village. Nobody met us, nobody waited for us. . . Assyrians saw their houses which they left over seven years ago, and watched them with eyes full of tears, and couldn't walk in because all were occupied by strange people, mainly of Azerbaijani nationality. Our own house, built of red bricks, looked very nice, and the local Communist Party district official ("apparatchik") Ali Geidarov lived in it with his family.

We were homeless people. Some local residents allowed a few Assyrian families, out of pity for them, to live temporarily in their barns. The management of the collective farm ("Kolkhoz") provided empty stores and barns that were used before our arrival for raisin drying and for other needs, for settlement of Assyrian families in them, and we, 3-4 households together, shared these shelters. There were lots of jobs in "Kolkhoz," and Assyrians were offered work in fields and on farms. Every morning our parents on their way to work passed by their houses that no longer belonged to them. They felt sad and sorrowful, but no anger or hatred. There was no single person who was supposed to be responsible for their exile to Siberia and their troubles as they returned. In fact, a crime was committed against them, but there weren't any criminals available to complain against. Khrushchev ordered a few of the most dangerous friends of Stalin and his own rivals shot: Beria, Baguirov, etc., and he congratulated himself as if justice was restored. But people, victims of exile, felt miserable, and suffered. And nobody was responsible for what happened to them.



Then, former inmates of Siberian special zones collected money, as much as they could, and sent their "delegation," consisting of four or five persons, the most educated ones, to Moscow to apply for "just, lawful and humane treatment" to them; and the main purpose was to get the houses back to their owners. Assyrian delegates wasted a month in Moscow, spent all the money, and failed to accomplish anything. Then, Assyrians, victims of exile, decided to move to another area, because they merely couldn't stand this — watching their houses every day and not possessing them. The new place of settlement was found in neighboring Georgia, 20 miles south of Tbilisi (capital of Georgia), where we started from scratch: building modest dwellings, planting fruit trees and vines in our tiny yard, etc. At this time I was 15 and was leaving for Moscow to study in the Technical school. Our family didn't like to talk about Siberia, although the exile made a significant impact on our psychology and remained forever in our memory. Unlike Assyrians, the Soviet authorities tried to "forget" the exile to Siberia and its consequences for our people, as if this never took place. Assyrians were just "excused," as if they really were guilty — the Soviets never recognized our innocence and never attempted to compensate for the awful moral and material losses of the Assyrian people. The authorities merely preferred to ignore the needs and problems and the existence of our minority.

Here, I come to the end of my story. I have realized my father's wish and narrated something from the life of my Assyrian people. I was eager to fulfill that moral duty. One day my father told me some remarkable words. He said, "If we have no respect for our past, other people would not have respect for us." To have respect for the past means to implant it in the mind and keep it in perspective in order to convey it to the succeeding generations. The last seven years in exile to Siberia was really not too far a distance in the past. It became an integral part of our lives.

There on the wall in our living room are two framed photographs of my sisters, Marta and Elza, aged 18 and 16 respectively, who became victims of the Siberian exile. Their young eyes are watching into my very soul, as if they want to send a message — "Don't forget about us . . ." "I will not forget, I promise you," my lips are whispering in response.

*Editor's Note: This concludes the series of articles on the "Assyrians in the Siberian Exile (1949-1956) — Memories." We wish to thank Ilia Vartanov for his initiative in producing this outstanding work, relating to us an episode hidden from the pages of our Assyrian history. We commend him for his courage and fortitude in bringing it to light.*

## FEODOR AGHAKHAN, A RISING ASSYRIAN FOOTBALL STAR

*by Sargon B. Yalda*

It seems like yesterday when Feoder Aghakhan and I used to drive to his nephew's school to pick young Ninef up occasionally or to drop him there sometimes for an after school activity.

Ninef must have been around ten years old back then. Several years passed by and the next I heard was that a young Assyrian boy had been awarded an athletic scholarship through football by the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Michigan. Little did I know that he would be Ninef; it was a very pleasant surprise when I found out, though! It is about time, I thought, that one of our own young men gained some national recognition. Earlier this year his talent was emphasized through the special article about him by Mike McGraw from the *Daily Herald*, and I feel this is just the beginning.



At 6'3" weighing 275 lbs., Ninef now has a starting position as a middle guard (No. 90) with the Michigan Wolverines. Ninef was born in Baghdad and lived in Kuwait with his parents. His dad, Freidoune, then a bank manager in Kuwait, is the son of the late "Usta" Yacoub Aghakhan, a well-known Assyrian gentleman from the days of Habbaniya. At the age of eight Ninef was sent to do his schooling in the United States where he lived with his grandparents in their home at Mount Prospect, Illinois.

The Assyrian Society in Chicago is indeed very proud to have such an outstanding scholar within its ranks, for it is not often that the Assyrians produced a young man like Ninef on a national competitive level. This was reflected by the presentation of "The Assyrian Athlete of the Year" Award from the Assyrian Athletic Club of Chicago last February.

We are all very proud of you, Ninef, and may God guide you through your life and career and protect you throughout.

# FAITH FROM RUINS

A CHURCH IN SAN JOSE HASN'T FORGOTTEN THE 20,000 CHRISTIANS STILL STRANDED IN SYRIA, TURKEY AND IRAN AFTER THE GULF WAR.

by Dave O'Brian, Staff Writer  
San Jose Mercury News, January 4, 1992

*"When the plight of the Persian Gulf refugees first became known, all the media spoke of the Kurds. The Christians among them were ignored . . . Being a minority among a minority, their situation was even tougher than that of the Kurds."*

***Bishop A. Bawai Soro, Holy Apostolic  
Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, Willow Glen***

For Bishop A. Bawai Soro, who was born in Iraq and is now assigned to the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East in Willow Glen, his latest mission is his most difficult.

"My job is the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ," he says. "I am not primarily political. But now I am forced to speak of the issues of justice and peace in the world."

In the wake of both the long, bloody war between Iraq and Iran and the Persian Gulf war, he is speaking out on behalf of about 20,000 homeless Christians who are still stranded in refugee camps in Turkey, Syria and Iran.

He calls these displaced thousands "the forgotten victims of the Persian Gulf war" and he is urging the United States to open its borders to them.

"Our church is asking the U.S. government to help those refugees who cannot return to Iraq and who wish to come to the United States," says Soro, 37, the bishop in charge of the Western states for his little-known Christian church. "We are asking the developed world to receive them as refugees."

His church in San Jose is a small, recently renovated one serving about 300 families, all of Middle Eastern origin, and its Sunday-morning services are performed in the ancient Assyrian language of



*Bishop A. Bawai Soro is trying to help homeless Christian refugees from the gulf war who want to come to the United States.*

*Eugene Louie — Mercury News*

Aramaic — widely believed by scholars to be the language used by Jesus Christ.

“The Assyrians in California are from Iraq, Iran, Syria and Lebanon,” he says, “but here in San Jose, we are about 40 percent Iraqi and 60 percent Iranian.”

For members of his congregation, Soro adds, both the Iran-Iraq war and the more recent Persian Gulf war were impossibly agonizing times.

“Our two countries were at war for 10 years,” he explains, “but these people, who are of the same ethnic background, did nothing but pray for peace.”

Then came the mercifully brief Operation Desert Storm, which Soro recalls as “a civil war for us. Our new country, the United States, was fighting our old country.”

“Most times,” he concludes, “we are happy at any news for peace.”

Soro believes the time is just about right for his tiny church to begin to reach out to other churches and religions in the area.

“We have just a church and a social hall here now,” he says, “but we plan to build a small seminary to educate our faithful to become members of the priesthood. We also hope to build a Diocesan center where community services to the poor and the homeless can be offered.”

Soro has just taken a reporter on a brief tour of the church’s sleek, new sanctuary. Typical of this ancient religion, it features a simple, wooden altar bathed in the glow of a cross-shaped stained glass window — and little else.

As Soro explains church history, in the sixth century, members of neighboring Muslim temples feared the Assyrians worshipped the icons displayed in their churches and forced their removal. “Since then,” he says, “the walls of the sanctuary are bare except the sign of the cross.”

In the context of Americans’ vague and fading memories of the Persian Gulf war, Soro reminds us that his homeland has a good deal more history, culture and civilization attached to it than empty deserts and oil wells.

The land now known as Iraq was once Mesopotamia, Soro notes. It served as the cradle of civilization’s birth and added so much to the civilized world that we all take for granted today. In this ancient land, archaeologists have found the earliest evidence of organized human society — evidence of early writings, maps, cities and codified laws.

“Mesopotamians were among the first human beings to turn from hunting to agriculture,” Soro says, “from simple conquest to government and self-rule, from superstition to science.”

The earliest roots of Judeo-Christian culture have also been found here.

Soro says the Assyrian Church of the East has existed in California since the 1940s. Although it wasn’t until July that he was transferred from his former congregation, a small Assyrian parish in Toronto, before he arrived here church officials assigned him to visit eight Middle Eastern refugee camps on a fact-finding mission.

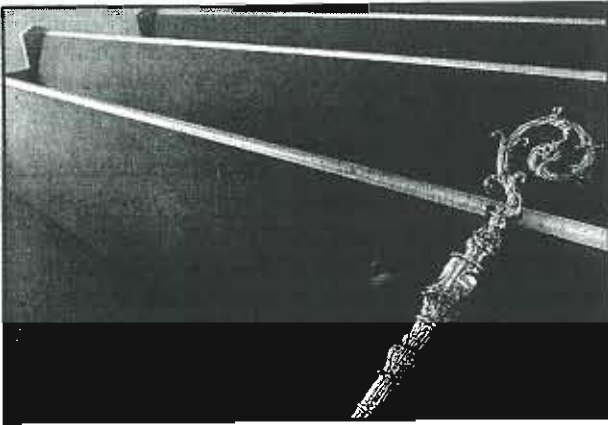
“When the plight of the Persian Gulf refugees first became known, all the media spoke of the Kurds,” he says. “The Christians among them were ignored. Their needs were not met. Being a minority among a minority, their situation was even tougher than that of the Kurds.”

Most of those he visited, Soro says, told him they have no homes, property or jobs to return to in Iraq — and are hoping they will eventually be resettled in this country.

In most of the camps, he adds, the medical care, water and food supplies were inadequate. He describes a boy he met who was suffering from gangrene, a man whose left hand and foot had been blown off when he stepped on a land mine and a child with a heart problem.

“We are appealing to the compassion of the Western nations to make available resettlement programs for these refugees,” he says. “We feel strongly that the West has some type of moral obligation to help these people in light of the aftermath of the gulf war.”

**If you’re interested . . .** the Assyrian Church of the East is located at 680 Minnesota Ave., Willow Glen. Weekly services are 10 a.m. Sundays. For more information, call the church weekdays at (408) 286-7377.



*The ceremonial staff of Bishop Soro of the Assyrian Church of the East in San Jose.*

*Eugene Louie — Mercury News*

## TAQADUM SCHOOL, BAGHDAD, IRAQ SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS — 1951

In 1922 the Assyrian Evangelical Church in Baghdad opened a school under the name The Assyrian Evangelical School. The principal of the school was Kasha Khando Yonan, while the church was headed by Kasha Peera Mirza of Urmia. In 1928, with the departure of Kasha Peera to the United States, Kasha Khando was ordained the pastor of the church and continued as the principal of the school. By 1935 there were nine grade levels.

To comply with the public school curriculum, in 1937, the school taught classes through the sixth grade only, and the name was changed to Taqadum School. In 1950, with the death of Kasha Khando, Raabi Koorish Shlemon (now residing in Des Plaines, Illinois) was appointed as the principal of the school. He served the school as well as the church for many years. In 1973 the school was taken over by the government.



*Front row (l to r): Youel Youkhana, Joseph Talia, Yakob Eshoo, Voltaire Warda, Wilson Aprim, Henry Hawel, John.*

*Second row (l to r): Raabi Nanajan, Raphael, Klaiman, Ando, Elia Youkhana, Sargon Sarkis, Korkies, Fredrick Baba, David Antar.*

*Third row (l to r): Eglantine Israel, Adaina Babilla, Tokohie, Youlia Youkhana, Roza Misak, Clara Eshaya.*

*Back row - Teachers (l to r): Mr. Mehdi Al-Hakim, Raabi Nanajan Badal (now in Turlock, CA), Ms. Ghazala, Ms. Mary, Mr. Khadoori, Mr. Shawkat Shamoun.*

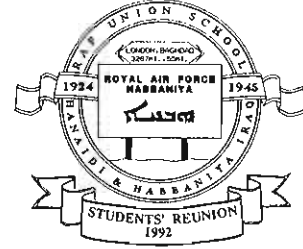
*Photograph courtesy of David Antar*

# HABBANIYA UNION SCHOOL

P. O. Box 4224  
Des Plaines, IL 60016  
U.S.A.

## ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

Sargon Aboona  
Odisho Warda  
Benyamin Yalda  
Zakharia O. Zakharia



## HABBANIYA UNION SCHOOL STUDENTS' REUNION

As we had mentioned previously in the *Nineveh* magazine (fourth quarter of 1991), the idea of having a Habbaniya Union School Students' Reunion in Chicago was rekindled and the Organizing Committee came up with the following agenda. The whole context of discussion was carried in the light of and in harmony with the 1992 Assyrian Convention being held in Chicago.

- The Convention will be held from September 2 to 7 at the Conrad Hilton on Michigan Avenue, called the Magnificent Mile, in the heart of beautiful downtown Chicago.
- Experience has taught us that a lot of our people from all over the world do come to the convention to share and enjoy the full-time program covering the convention days.
- The Habbaniya Union School Students' Reunion program will be amalgamated to fall on Friday, September 4, 1992.
- In order to be able to decide on the type, variety and extent of the program, the Organizing Committee will depend on a timely response and feedback from the prospective participants.
- The Proforma on the reverse will be the data collection base that will influence the structure, and we urge all those interested to complete and return the proforma to reach us no later than June 15, 1992. You may mail this direct to the above address or to one of the Committee members near you. More copies of proforma could be obtained from one of these members upon request.

God's blessings and good luck to you all.

# HABBANIYA UNION SCHOOL STUDENTS' REUNION P R O F O R M A

**Applicable to those outside Chicago:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
(First) (Middle) (Last) (Residence)

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to attend the Habbaniya Union School Students' Reunion being held in Chicago on Friday, September 4, 1992. I will be accompanied by the following members of my family:

\_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

I/We shall be arriving in Chicago on \_\_\_\_\_

I/We shall require hotel reservations for \_\_\_\_\_ persons

I/We shall be staying with relatives/friends at

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

I will call to advise you of my arrival.

**Applicable to Chicagoans:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
(First) (Middle) (Last) (Residence)

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to attend the Habbaniya Union School Students' Reunion being held in Chicago on Friday, September 4, 1992.

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ tickets for the following members of my family:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(Children under 12 will not be allowed)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**ILLINOIS**  
 Sargon Aboona  
 4435 W. Wilson Tr.  
 Skokie, IL 60076  
 (708) 674-1184

**ILLINOIS**  
 Odisho Warda  
 9340 W. Western  
 Des Plaines, IL 60016  
 (708) 699-1913

**ILLINOIS**  
 Benyamin Yalda  
 9350 N. Parkside Dr.  
 Des Plaines, IL 60016  
 (708) 296-7587

**ILLINOIS**  
 Zakharia O. Zakharia  
 7744 W. Church  
 Morton Grove, IL 60053  
 (708) 581-1345

**CALIFORNIA**  
 Michael Pius  
 3504 Setrok Dr.  
 Modesto, CA 95356  
 (209) 545-4120

**CALIFORNIA**  
 Julius N. Shabbas  
 P.O. Box 2620  
 Berkeley, CA 94702

**CANADA**  
 Mirza Shmoil  
 72 Orpington Cres.  
 Rexdale, Ont. M9V 3E6  
 (416) 742-5676

**ENGLAND**  
 Andrious Mama Jotyar  
 108 Aldemey Rd.  
 Slade Green, Kent DA8 2JD  
 0322-331711

**ENGLAND**  
 Enwia Warda  
 84 Aldemey Rd.  
 Slade Green, Kent DA8 2JD  
 3223-33722

**AUSTRALIA**  
 Dinkha Warda  
 11 Nowland Pl.  
 Abbotsbury, Sydney NSW 2176  
 823-2950

# A GERMAN-BASED HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP HAS MADE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION IN PUBLICIZING THE ASSYRIAN CONDITION IN IRAQ TO THE WORLD AT LARGE

*By Francis Sarguis*

Although several human-rights organizations have done a first-rate job of reporting on the significant hardships endured by innocent civilians in Iraq, the *Society for Threatened Peoples*, home-based in Gottingen, Germany, deserves the special attention and gratitude of Assyrians.

For example, current accounts in the media about the refugee masses in northern Iraq refer to them collectively as "Kurds," or "Kurdish," making no mention of the thousands of Assyrians among them.

*What appears to be a systemic onslaught on the very existence of our people has been going on at a heightened pace for more than two decades.*

While the media's inadequate attention to the Assyrians is explained by their addiction to the 60-second story line, reputable private groups such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Minority Rights Group, could be doing much more to educate the public that many of those suffering refugees are Assyrians, even if the large majority of the refugees are Kurds.

This brings us to the *Society for Threatened Peoples* which, to its credit, has closely tracked all of the civilian hardships in northern Iraq, both Kurdish and Assyrian. As early as March 1979, the *Society* reported on the destruction of a number of Assyrian villages, and also on the destruction of several more villages occupied by a mix of Assyrians and Kurds. The *Society* based that report on copious interviews and Assyrian refugees from the area.

Eight years later (in 1987), the *Society* interviewed a number of individuals who had been witnesses to a new round of destruction of Assyrian villages. In addition to conventional fire power, the Iraqi army used chemical weapons in April 1987, in effect, liquidating 35 Assyrian villages located in eight districts of northern Iraq: in *Broari Bala*, *El Amadije*, *Ser Senk*, *Zaiote*, *Raouendos*, *Sehel*, and *Nejnaoar* districts.

According to the *Society*, Iraq has resorted to administrative regulations of the Baath Party, air attacks and forced relocations, to eradicate a number of Assyrian churches and monasteries. The *Society's* Report No. 4 (February 1991) actually names several specific structures, and it is shocking to learn that some of these were sanctuaries of worship dating back to the 6th and 7th century A.D.

What appears to be a systemic onslaught on the very existence of our people has been going on at a heightened pace for more than two decades. The increasingly precarious condition of our people was the subject of an article I published in *The Nation* magazine more than 15 years ago (May 31, 1975). Little seems to have changed since that time.

The generally-accepted definition of "ethnocide" is the annihilation of the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic character of a national group, or its assimilation *by force*. As recently as August 1988, the *Society* reported on the ruins of 85 churches (both Chaldean Catholic and Church of the East); while 5 Assyrian villages near the Turkish border were attacked with poison gas, with an estimated 2,000 casualties.

As the *Society* states in its report:

The Assyrian Christians have suffered no less than the Kurdish civilian population from the countless mass executions and massacres since 1968.

Specific names of individuals are given by the *Society*, to identify Assyrians who have been executed for political reasons and, in the case of children, for no reason whatsoever.

While most Assyrians are aware of the magnitude of suffering by their people in Iraq, there has been mostly ignorance about us in the Western media. If we hope for the more fortunate countries of the Western hemisphere to extend a hand to our beleaguered people, we must recognize the absolute importance of carrying our message beyond our own inner circles.

The *Society for Threatened Peoples* has not necessarily increased our own understanding of the situation, because we have already heard it firsthand from friends and relatives. But the *Society* is rendering a great service to the Assyrian people by disseminating this information from its respected platform.

Assyrians who are concerned about the future of their people in Iraq and in the Middle East generally, should consider writing a thank-you note (and perhaps sending their contribution) to:

*Society for Threatened Peoples*  
D-3400 Gottingen  
Postfach 2024  
Germany

By the way, you can also order a copy of the Report by writing to the above address, specifying that you want Report No. 4 (February 1991) and enclosing \$10.00 U.S.

## Shamiram — Assyrian Folkloric Ensemble from Moscow, USSR — Visits California

A group of young Assyrian men and women from Moscow, called the *Shamiram Folkloric Ensemble*, made a tour of California in late August and early September 1991. The 25 dancers, singers and musicians were accompanied by a choreographer as well as Dr. Vladimir Kalamonov, president of the Assyrian Congress of the U.S.S.R., and Dr. Eugene Gevorgisov, an active member in Moscow. The group was sponsored by the Assyrian American National Federation and performed at their annual convention in San Diego, Calif. on the Labor Day weekend. Performances were also held at the Modesto Junior College auditorium and at the Assyrian American Civic Club in Turlock, Calif. All were very well attended. Dr. Vladimir Tuman also participated actively on behalf of the Assyrian American Civic Club of Turlock in making arrangements for their trip to California.

The dancers appeared in beautiful hand-made Assyrian costumes. The performance opened with *Zoorna* (horn) — *Davoola* (drum) which was then followed by the dancers. The audience was delighted with the wonderful and varietal traditional dancing steps undertaken by the group. During the evening several changes of costumes were made to match the particular dance performed, for instance the *Shepherd* dance. The dances were then followed by two singers who sang Assyrian folkloric songs. It is interesting to note that these singers, a young man and a young woman, were born in the U.S.S.R., unlike the Assyrian singers in the United States who are born overseas.

The Assyrians of California had a wonderful time meeting those from the U.S.S.R. Many conversations and discussions between them were always going on as the two groups were getting to know each other. It is reassuring to see how Assyrians everywhere are seeking to keep their identity.



*Shamiram — Assyrian Folkloric Ensemble from Moscow*







*Shamiram — Assyrian Folkloric Ensemble from Moscow.*



*California and Moscow Assyrians group picture at the Assyrian American Civic Club hall.*



*Dr. Eugene Gevargisov flanked by Julius N. Shabbas on the left, and Belles Yelda on the right.*



## IN MEMORIAM

### *Bato Paul Elias*



Bato Paul Elias, 89, passed away on February 15, 1992 in Turlock, CA. She was born in 1903 in the village of Adah, in Urmia, Iran, to Isaac and Elishwa Paul. She attended the American Presbyterian Missionary School in Urmia and was remembered by everyone as an exceptionally bright student. In 1918 the Assyrians in Urmia were attacked by the Turks, Kurds and Persians and eventually fled for their lives. Bato, who was 15, fled south with her mother and younger brother. Cholera and typhoid struck them and Bato went into a coma from the high fever. When she regained consciousness her mother's body was lying alongside her, a scene that remained burned in her memory for the rest of her life. On her own now, she and the other survivors reached the refugee camp in Baquba, Iraq, where she remained for two years.

Her father, who had previously gone to the United States with plans to bring the family over, brought her to Chicago where they were reunited in 1921. Two years later she married Jesse Elias of Shemshajeon. During the next 28 years in Chicago they were faithful members of Carter Memorial Assyrian Presbyterian Church and its beloved minister, Rev. Haidow Ablahat. In 1949 the family moved to Turlock, CA. When Jesse passed away there in 1987 they had been married 64 years.

The funeral service was held on February 18 at St. John's Assyrian Presbyterian Church of Turlock with Rev. George Shahbaz officiating.

Bato is survived by two sons, Foundation member Joel (Berkeley, CA) and Wilbur (Stockton, CA);

six grandchildren; two great grandchildren; brothers Edward Paul (Southern California) and Robert Paul (Iran), and a sister Grace Khoshaba (Iran).

Bato was a woman who was totally dedicated to her family and her Church. Although small in stature she was very dynamic and had tremendous energy. She was one of a group of women who raised money for the church in Turlock for many years by baking and selling "Kadi." To avoid the heat in the summer, the group would meet in the church kitchen at 3:00 in the morning and finish baking the 100 or so "Kade" before noon. All the women remember her as a bundle of energy driving everyone on to finish the job even though they were getting tired. Bato was a person of great inner strength. During the Depression of the 1930's she worked full time in Chicago in a shop making women's hats, a job she held until 1949. This was quite unusual for an Assyrian immigrant woman of her generation at that time. With that same strength and determination she gave totally of herself to her children, instilling in them a deep sense of moral and religious values and a respect for education which they will carry for the rest of their lives and try to pass on to their children. Thank you, mother, for not only giving us life but the values to live by.

*Written by Joel Elias*

### *Parie Bet-Badal*



Parie Bet-Badal passed on to eternal life on January 28, 1992 in Tehran, Iran at the age of 82. Born in the village of Mushawa, Urmia, Iran in 1910 to Mikhail and Susenbar, she was 8 years old when the family fled the area due to the tragic Assyrian





# تعمه دٲٲ قبتلب تذن

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# ארתור שולמן

היה דובר עברית . חלוצי .

ד"ר קליין : חלוצי .

מועצת המנהל :

היה מנהל המועצה : חלוצי .

היה יושב ראש : חלוצי .

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# مَدْرَسَاتُ دَرَجَاتِ دَلَاهُوتِ دَرَجَاتِ:

تَب: اَهْمِيك دَرَجَات . مَدْرَس : اَهْمِيك

مَدْرَسَاتُ هَكَذَا دَلَاهُوتِ دَرَجَاتِ دَرَجَاتِ مَدْرَسَاتِ .

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חל אהודתא דתעבדא : תי מן דודא דתעבדא תי תדא תללמ דתעבדא  
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## Nineveh

"Sennacherib built a great inner wall to enclose a city area of about one thousand acres.<sup>(Ed. 1)</sup> . . . . Beyond, and forming a great arc round the city meeting the Tigris to north and south, was a great outer wall. North and south of the city were further parks, and it is likely that the cultivated land of the city spread out from five to ten miles beyond."

H. W. F. Saggs  
*The Might That Was Assyria*

Ed. 1 - 1800 acres per *Encyclopedia Britannica*

Nineveh "was no small city, fully two-thirds of Rome within the Aurelian wall, but as it was somewhat less closely settled, we may follow the analogy of modern oriental cities and estimate the total population at something like 300,000."

A. T. Olmstead  
*History of Assyria*



## ASSURBANIPAL GRAPHICS

Ashur Banipal Mansour  
 Computer Graphics  
 P.O. Box 7334  
 Northridge, CA 91327-7334

הם לא מנסים להגן על עצמם מפני איומים של פגיעה בפרטיותם. הם מנסים להגן על עצמם מפני איומים של פגיעה בפרטיותם.

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תשובה לדבריך: למה לכתוב? איך תוכלו לראות את זה? איך תוכלו לראות את זה?

אם תסתכלו, תראו את זה: זהו תשובה לדבריך: למה לכתוב? איך תוכלו לראות את זה? איך תוכלו לראות את זה?

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# מתיבנה? ל: דגדג לנגדו דגדג

## מ: ל: מתיבנה יל דגדג לנגדו דגדג

תב: איך תוכלו לראות את זה?

מתיבנה יל דגדג לנגדו דגדג. איך תוכלו לראות את זה? איך תוכלו לראות את זה?

אם תסתכלו, תראו את זה: זהו תשובה לדבריך: למה לכתוב? איך תוכלו לראות את זה? איך תוכלו לראות את זה?







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TO

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# ܐܦܝܪܝܝܝܝܘܬܝܢ

We are uprooted from our ancestral land!  
No fault of ours! We are now homeless! We  
know not where to go! What to do! The  
shelter of our Church is no longer there!  
Destroyed! Up yonder! Is there someone  
who cares about us? We appeal to you, in the  
name of humanity, in this darkest of hours,  
to stretch your merciful hand and rescue us  
from these calamities! We sit and think and  
recollect! We console ourselves in the mem-  
ories of the past! We pray that Almighty  
God give us the strength to endure these  
moments of hardships — to strengthen our  
souls to persevere! We are a patient people  
— a patient nation — and patience streng-  
thens the spirit!

*The Refugees*



*An Assyrian Refugee*

*You may send your donations to the Assyrian Foundation of America  
or the Assyrian Aid Society of America.*

ܐܦܝܪܝܝܝܝܘܬܝܢ - ܐܦܝܪܝܝܝܝܘܬܝܢ - ܐܦܝܪܝܝܝܝܘܬܝܢ