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Assyrian Foundation of
America's Young Adult group

Cultural - Educational - Social

NINEVEH

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POLICY

Articles submitted for publication will be selected by the editorial staff on the basis of their relative merit to Assyrian literature, history, and current events.

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In this issue:

ܩܠܡܢܝܢܘܒܝܗ:

-English Section

From the President	3
Young Adult Group Report.....	4
AFA 44th Anniversary.....	6
Assyrian Inscriptions in Lebanon.....	8
Assyrian Church in Saudi Arabia.....	10
Assyrian Martyrs' Day Event.....	11
Assyrian Woman.....	12
Growing up Guergis.....	14
Bravo Section.....	16
New Books	18
Wedding Anniversary.....	20
Interview with Ishtar Michaels	21
My American Assyrian Experience.....	22
Assyrian Art in Boston.....	24
Origins of Olympic Games.....	28
Assyrian Heritage DNA Project.....	31
Ancient Churches in Iraq's Desert.....	34
Survival in Diaspora.....	36
In Memoriam.....	38
10 Assyrian Words.....	39
Subscriptions and Donations.....	40
Funeral Luncheons.....	42

ܩܠܡܢܝܢܘܒܝܗ:

44.....	ܣܘܚܝܬܝܢ ܕܟܘܪܕܝܢ
45.....	ܥܡܘܫܝܢܝܗ
47.....	ܝܩܝܬܝܗ ܕܒܝܗܝܗ
49.....	ܥܩܠܝܗ ܕܚܘܪܘܬܝܗ ܕܚܘܪܘܬܝܗ
51.....	ܥܡܘܫܝܢܝܗ



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From the President:

This year as many years before, on August 7th, the Assyrian nation throughout the world remembered its fallen heroes who sacrificed their life for this nation to survive. For centuries this nation has gone through many dark periods, dodging and maneuvering through massacres, genocides, persecution, and discrimination to avoid extinction. Since the fall of the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C. up to this day, Assyrians have had to develop masterful skills in survival. The reason I call it masterful skill in survival is because of the numerous threats and challenges this nation has endured for many centuries and managed to stay alive. It is ironic to say or think that we have adapted to these horrific challenges and threats and proved our resilience. In early decades of the twentieth century, during the First World War, an estimated 750,000 Assyrians were massacred, kidnapped, and chased out of their homes and villages by the Turks and Kurds for being Christian. Sons and daughters of this nation paid with their blood and sacrificed their lives for it to survive. Martyrs and heroes like Mar Benyamin Shimon, Fraidon Aturaya, Yousip Tuma, Youbert Benyamin and many others who not only sacrificed their life, but also the life of their family members in some cases. In August of 1933, another attempt was made by the Iraqi government with its newly formed army to erase the Assyrian existence in Iraq by killing over 3,000 men, women, and children in a very cruel and barbaric way in Simele and the surrounding Assyrian villages. In Iraq today, Assyrians are once again going through very difficult and dangerous time. Many are being killed, kidnapped, and chased out of their homes by Islamic extremists. In some areas in Iraq, Assyrians are

From the Editor:

Until a few decades ago, it seemed that there was an inexhaustible source of "fresh Assyrian blood" in the Near East which, through migration, would replenish and sustain the communities in Diaspora. Therefore, there was not much concern about the rapid and almost total assimilation of Assyrians in Diaspora. No serious efforts were made to build schools, cultural centers, effective social and political organizations and networks to adapt, nurture, strengthen and propagate our identity and heritage in our new homes.

The events of the recent past have demonstrated very clearly that our future, as a people, in the Near East is insecure, at best. The wars, the covert and overt attempts at ethnic and/or religious cleansing as well as social, economic and political discrimination have been driving us out of our traditional homelands at ever increasing rates so that, it is estimated, our population in the Near East numbers less than half of what it was only ten years ago. In fact, many of those who still remain in the Near East live as internally displaced individuals within their home country or as refugees in neighboring countries; in neither case is there much concern nor support for them by any of the local or international governments. And, as conditions remain

forced to pay religious tax called "Jiziah" for not being Muslims or face death. Since the beginning of the war in 2003, thousands of Assyrians have been killed, several hundreds if not thousands were kidnapped for ransoms, many churches were blown up and burnt to the ground, and hundreds of thousands turned to refugees inside their country and abroad. All this is happening while our political parties and organizations are busy fighting, blaming and insulting each other creating further division and hate for personal gains. It is long overdue for our political parties, organizations, and true patriots to put their helpless nation above their personal agendas and interests. It is time for the sons and daughters of Assyria to wake up and help their badly wounded nation to survive and prosper. In this issue of this publication as in the last, the Assyrian Foundation of America as an independent, nonpolitical, and nonreligious organization is pleading with all the Assyrian political parties and organizations to come together and work toward one common goal. That goal should be Assyria. The Assyrian Foundation of America will gladly perform the role of honest and independent peace broker if necessary.



"We must hang together, or assuredly, we shall all hang separately" - Sir Winston Churchill.

*God save and protect the Assyrian Nation.
Fredy Tamraz*

unstable or deteriorate, the out-migration will continue as well, leading to depletion of our communities in the traditional homelands.

We must and will, of course, do all we can to help and support our communities in the Near East. Our ancestors were among the very first humans to settle and establish communities in northern Mesopotamia, more than seven millennia ago; we can not let this be the end.

However, we can no longer expect those communities to be the sole guardians of our identity and heritage. It is time for us to do our share. We have been in our new homes for more than a century and yet majority of those active in our communities are immigrants. Clearly, if we don't engage, encourage, support and guide our young people to get involved and, in time, take over our organizations, the continued depletion in the Near East along with assimilation in the West, will bring about our end as a living people.

The Assyrian Foundation of America's Young Adult Group, which was formed by young Assyrian men and women in the San Francisco Bay Area, (Ms. Donatella Yelda has been the main catalyst in its formation) will be, we hope, part of the transitioning of our communities from Immigrants to well-integrated natives that will adapt, maintain, strengthen and propagate our heritage and, when the time is right, repopulate our traditional homelands.

Assyrian Foundation of America's Young Adult Group (AFAYAG)



Mission Statement

Being a Young Assyrian Adult in the Bay Area can be both a joy and a struggle. A joy because our culture connects us to something far greater than ourselves and provides us with much needed stability, guidance, and strength in our daily lives. A struggle because we are few

American subculture in the mainstream as well as provide a bridge to all Assyrians in the world.

About the Young Assyrian Adult Group

The group is primarily made up of single students and/or professionals in their twenties and thirties. Our members range from first to third generation Assyrian Americans. We are not affiliated with any religious or political group, our only affiliation is with the Assyrian Foundation of America and we are bound by its bylaws.

Our goals are:

- To promote Assyrian culture and values by providing social, cultural, recreational and community programs, thereby uniting the Assyrian youth community, and raising awareness about Assyrian culture in the local communities.

- To make a positive difference in the community by providing social, cultural, educational, professional and recreational programs.

- To foster community spirit by creating a place for Assyrian young adults to come together.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the "Young Adult Group"?

The Young Adult Group is a community of young adults in their 20's and 30's who value socializing, volunteering and exploring questions of their heritage and national origin with others who share a similar heritage and value system.

Why should I attend a meeting?

There are many great reasons to attend a meeting. Some people come for the social aspects, to meet others with similar backgrounds. Others want to become more involved in community service activities. Exploring and



in the area and we are constantly trying to educate non-Assyrians of our rich heritage and the dangers we face today, namely, losing our identity in the western melting pot as well as the physical danger our people are faced with in the Middle East.

Our goal is to form a social and cultural community for the Assyrian young adults in the Bay Area, to work together and assure a successful future for the Assyrian Foundation of America and to be a resource for our community by providing support where it is most needed and to promote awareness and understanding of the Assyrian-

questioning different aspects of our nationality and culture motivate some to attend.

How often does the Young Adult Group meet?

The group meets bi-weekly to discuss goals and steps to achieve them and also to schedule future events. The meetings are usually combined with social hour and fun.

How old are the people who go, and what are their backgrounds?

The group will be primarily made up of single, students and professional in their twenties and thirties.



Will I be forced to participate in AFA meetings?

How you choose to participate is up to you. We encourage you to get to know AFA and all the good it does and from there you can choose whether you want to participate in AFA activities to further strengthen the community.

Can I join the Assyrian Foundation of America's Young Adult Group?

All Assyrian young adults living in the San Francisco Bay Area are welcomed and encouraged to become a member of our group not only for the social aspect, but to meet others with similar background and keep the culture alive, to question and learn about our history, community and the struggle of our people. For more information on how to join our group or if you would like to be added to our e-mail list for future events, please e-mail us at: afayag@yahoo.com

What are some of the social events you have?

Snow/ski weekend to South Lake Tahoe

The weekend of April 18th – 20th eighteen of us made a trip to South Lake Tahoe, where we stayed at a Ski Chalet. The weekend was filled with various activities ranging from lounging around watching sports to hiking, biking, playing in snow, barbequing and dancing.

Camping Trip to Mt. Lassen

The weekend of July 12th -13th fifteen young adults headed up to Mt. Lassen in Northern California for a fun weekend of camping. The group lodged in tents and

Day at the Beach



On Thursday, August 14, 2008, the group made a trip to Santa Cruz for a fun day at the beach and concluded the day at the boardwalk.

AFAYAG, July 12th, and August 10th Report

On July 12th 2008, AFAYAG had a social event at Mount Lassen. This was a three day camping event that not only was fun for everyone, but also provided an opportunity for the 16 attending member to choose the AFAYAG's board.

Amidst the beautiful scenery, the challenging hikes, and the gatherings around the fire at night, the members bonded and enjoyed each other's company. Conversations varied from everyday subjects such as school, work, and traveling, to talks about the Assyrian language, books written in Assyrian and many great projects that our Assyrian youth is capable of doing to promote and introduce the Assyrian culture.

During this trip, the AFAYAYG chose its president, Arbella Malik, who has a great deal of experience in leadership from being the president of ASA (Assyrian Student Alliance of UC Berkeley) for two years. Allen Yohanna was chosen to be the vice president, Ramina Odah the secretary, and Sabrina Odah the treasurer. Nahir Sarmicanic was given the responsibility of looking into creating a website for the group to facilitate communication between the members. Ramina Sarmicanic was chosen to be the journalist; and finally Ranny Khanoo agreed to look for a place for the next social event of the group.

In the next meeting, on August 10th 2008, the future goals and tentative projects were discussed. At this meeting, Arbella Malik gave different ideas and topics to the members so they could choose the goals of this group. Discussion was on three different subjects:

- Fundraising for the Assyrians in Iraq
- Seminars for the Assyrian-American community
- Promoting higher education in the Assyrian community

Some of these ideas have the potential to be combined but a final goal will be voted on in the next meeting.

At the end, it is necessary to thank all the members who are supporting this group and keeping it strong. AFAYA also thanks the AFA members for supporting this new and young group, while we try to find our way towards greater projects.

AFA's Celebrates It's 44th year Anniversary

On Saturday, November 1st, 2008, the Assyrian Foundation of America (AFA) celebrated its 44th birthday.

It was a celebratory evening with friends and family, excellent music (provided by Edmond and his band), delectable food, great conversation and entertainment. In addition, with the raffle sale, a significant amount of money was raised to help with the various causes of the AFA.

The evening was started with the Assyrian National Anthem, performed by



Ms. Flora Kingsbury with the anniversary cake

Ms. Lorraine Davis accompanied on the piano by Ms. Elena Akopova. Ms. Davis also sang William Daniel's masterpiece, *Nineveh*.

Later, Dr. Joel Elias gave a brief history of the AFA; from its founding by a small group of Assyrians in the San Francisco area through its evolution during the past four decades. He described how, through the hard work of many over the years, the AFA has been able to not

only serve the needs of Assyrians in the San Francisco Bay Area, but, through the generous help from Assyrians from everywhere, it has helped various causes in many different places, especially the Near East. This has included assistance with the building of schools (in 2008, \$10,000 were sent to help with the building of a school in Syria, where some 400 Assyrian students will learn our



Dr. Elias giving a brief history of the AFA.



Mrs. Flora Kingsbury accepting the award on behalf of her husband, Bob.



Ms. Lorraine Davis, accompanied by Ms. Elena Akopova on the piano

language, culture and history among other subjects –this is a government recognized school); helping needy Assyrians, especially refugees (the areas of greatest need con-



Dr. Joel Elias accepting his award

tinue to be the internally displaced individuals in Iraq and those who have taken refuge in Syria, Jordan and Turkey); helping Assyrian students, especially those in fields like



Sheykhani, to the music of Edmond

Assyriology, international law, human rights, and others where we are un-/under-represented. The AFA has worked with local non-Assyrian organizations, such as the University of California at Berkeley, where a book fund for Assyrian studies has been established and several lectures have been cosponsored. We have also helped Assyrian authors by purchasing their books.

Among the many surprises during the evening, was the special recognition of two AFA members. Mr. Fredy Tamraz, AFA president, presented Dr. Joel Elias a life time achievement award for many years

of service in various positions on the board of directors, as an advisor, and as an editor of *Nineveh* magazine. Mr. Bob Kingsbury (affectionately known as *Miskeena* Bob = “poor Bob”), Flora’s husband and long time member, was honored with an award for years of dedicated service.

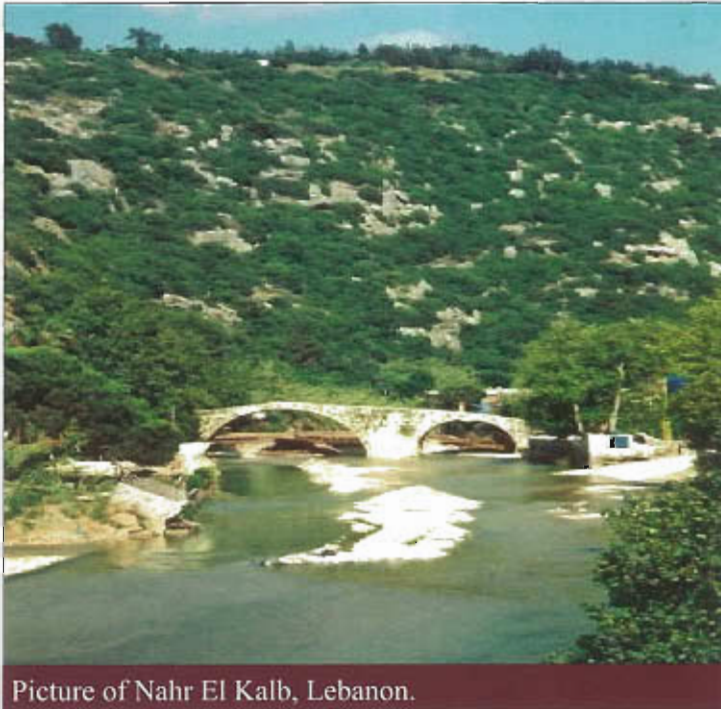
The guests enjoyed a gallery created by Ms. Lisa Kingsbury on the mirrored wall of the ballroom with posters containing their pictures along with statements they were asked to write to complete the sentence: ‘I love the Assyrian Foundation of America because.....’.

Flora Kingsbury, Social Chairperson, and her committee would like to thank all the Assyrian Foundation of America members and guests who attended and made the evening so enjoyable and successful.



Assyrian Inscriptions in Nahr El-Kalb, Lebanon

By Wardieh Boutros, Beirut, Lebanon



Picture of Nahr El Kalb, Lebanon.

The stele of Nahr el- Kalb, “the Dog River”, sum up the entire history of Lebanon from high antiquity to the present, evoking clearly the successive advances of the Pharaonic, Assyro-Babylonian, Greek, Roman, Arab, French and British armies which braved all the obstacles surrounding this difficult and very steep crossing point to carve commemorative stelae on the rocks.

This series of commemorative stelae erected in the same place in the open air gives a definite picture of all the important stages of the history of Lebanon from high Antiquity to the present day.

No other country can match Lebanon in the number of historical events and their relevance to world progress. Small in size, Lebanon has been massive in influence and



Tunnel entrance to Nahr el-Kalb, Lebanon

its people can rightfully claim to be the true benefactors of many ages... A few miles north of Beirut where Mount Lebanon touches the sea, the face of the rock of the Dog River gorge bears 22 inscriptions in almost as many languages beginning with ancient Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian, continuing with Greek and Latin, and ending with French, English and Arabic. These historical inscriptions, which date back to 1290 B.C, commemorate Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome, etc, and represent a unique combination of history and geography. So, this river has played a historical role which distinguishes it from others flowing from the heights to the Lebanese Mediterranean coast, it is located at the bottom of the deep valley “Nahr el-Kalb” which is surrounded by two parallel rock faces covered with green trees.

The Assyrians and Romans built a road and a bridge to overcome the steep cliffs that made the area an impenetrable barrier. The Pharaohs were the first to enter Nahr el-Kalb and they left three inscriptions between 1290 and 1224 B.C when Ramses II marched into Phoenicia.

The Assyrian army was next to enter Nahr el- Kalb and it left five stelae of the following Assyrian Kings: Aššur-aḫe-iddin, Sīn-aḫe-eriba, Aššur-našir-pal, and Nebukudurū-uššur. Nowadays, these inscriptions commemorate the history of Assyrian Empire in Lebanon that has been home to various civilizations and cultures for thousands of years.

Of greatest interest is a stela of the Assyrian King Aššur-aḫe-iddin (680-627 B.C). The profile of the King appears in each of the two stelae with the right hand raised. There are two inscriptions of Aššur-aḫe-iddin: one at the beginning of the river, and the second one is up in the mountain, close to the inscriptions of Ramses II. These two inscriptions provide indications of the Assyrian domination of the region at the onset of the first millennium B.C.

The third Assyrian inscription is that of Sīn-aḫe-eriba, son of Sargon II, whom he succeeded on the throne of Assyria between (705-681 BC). He ruled over a large part of Phoenicia; it is known that Tyre (an ancient city in South Lebanon) and other Phoenician cities were under the reign of Sīn-aḫe-eriba. In the year 701 B.C., he marched south, down the Mediterranean coast, to suppress rebellions by his vassals, Palestine backed by the kingdom of Judah. So the memories of Sīn-aḫe-eriba linger to the present day at Nahr el-Kalb and many Phoenician cities in Lebanon.

The fourth Assyrian inscription is that of Aššur-našir-pal II (884-859 B.C), who succeeded his father, Tukulti – Ninurta II. In 884 B.C., he conquered Mesopotamia and the territory of what is now Lebanon adding them to the growing Assyrian Empire. Aššur-našir-pal II did not annex

the Phoenician cities but instead aimed to establish them as a source of raw materials. Iron was needed for weapons and other tools and Lebanese cedar for construction.

On the north side of the river, beneath the Roman aqueduct, the Stela of Babylonian king, Nebu-kudurū-uṣṣur II (604 –562 B.C), is the fifth inscription that was discovered in year 1878. The text, dating back to 587 or 586 B.C., describes his campaign in Lebanon. Nebu-kudurū-uṣṣur left two copies of the same inscription, one at Nahr el-Kalb and one at Wadi Brissa, near Hermel.



Inscriptions from time of Assyrian king, Aššur-aḫe-iddin (Esarhaddon), in Nahr el-Kalb, Lebanon.



Stela of Sīn-aḫe-eriba (Sennacherib), in Lebanon

Thus, this historical river is a fascinating open air museum which many people over decades have visited and it still attracts visitors from all over the world to discover the history and ancient civilizations in the region as a whole



From Back Cover. 'San Jose's Gene Pool at the Guadalupe River Park & Gardens near Downtown San Jose. This piece celebrates the diversity of the people living in San Jose and Santa Clara County. The stones in the pool have first names of people from different ethnic groups carved in them including many Assyrian names such as Atur, Matay, Narsai, Ashur, Shamirum, etc. The concrete path to the 'Gene pool' contains names of various San Jose nationalities, starting with Assyrian.

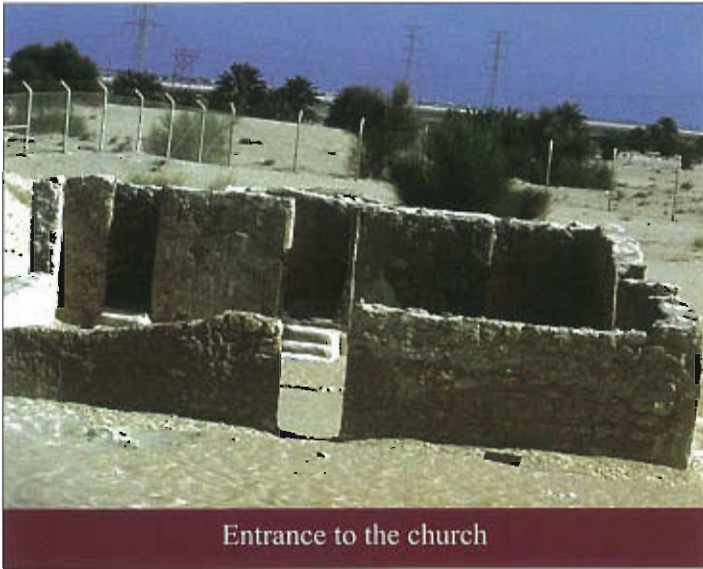


View of the 'Gene Pool' from Julian St.

4th Century Assyrian Church in Saudi Arabia

Bordering the Arabian Gulf and containing the towns of Dhahran, Al-Khobar, Dammam, Qatif, Hofuf and Jubail, the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia is where oil was first discovered in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s.

Near Jubail are the ruins of what was unearthed in the



Entrance to the church



Decorated stucco at the church

that it was in some way connected to one of the five Assyrian Church of the East bishoprics which are known to have existed in this area of the Gulf in the 4th century.

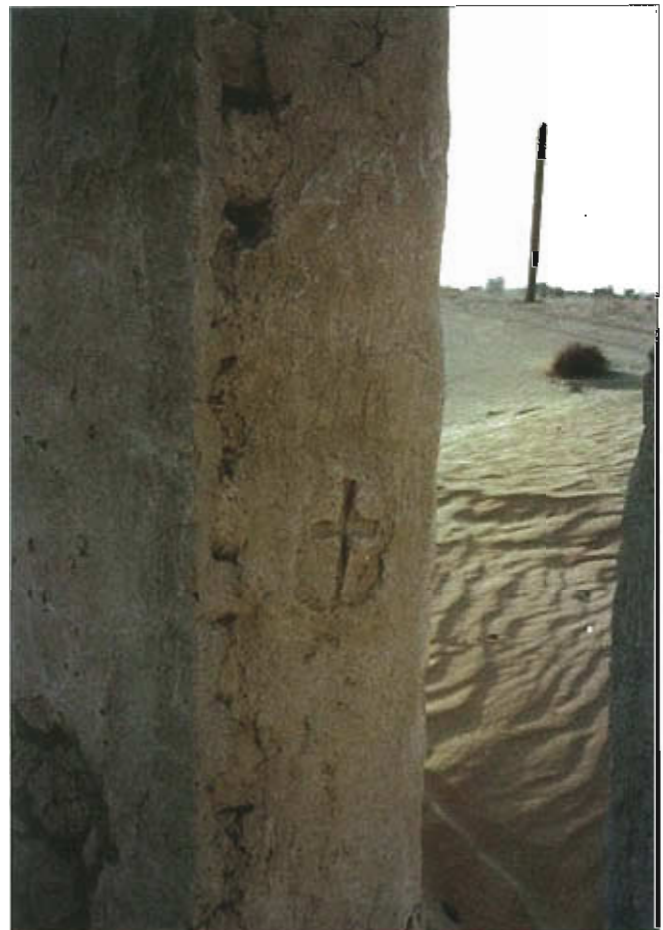
The following photographs taken by Robert and Patricia McWhorter during 1986 shortly after the ruins were partially excavated and protected by the Saudi Department of Antiquities.

mid-1980s by a group of people attempting to dig their vehicle out of the sand. The ruins are known as the Jubail Church and are acknowledged by the Saudi government,



Cross design in a doorway of the church. This recessed outline may have originally contained a stone or wooden cross

who will not issue permits to visit it because 'the site is being excavated.' In any case, the original ruins contained four stone crosses, which later went missing, though the marks where the crosses were are still visible. The ruins are thought to date from the 4th century, which make them older than any known church in Europe. Not much else is known but speculation is



Cross design in a doorway of the church.

Bay Area Assyrian Martyrs' Day Comemoration

By Dr. Ninwe Maraha

The Youth Chapter of the AUA of San Jose, California, organized a memorable Assyrian Martyr's Day remembrance on the 7th of August, 2008.

The commemoration of the Assyrian Martyr's day was a well-organized event. An event to remember and to make the world aware of the sufferings of the Assyrian nation during the Simele massacre in 1933, and the unrecognized Genocide of the Assyrian nation during World War I.



extinctions of many communities and villages. The Genocide during the period of WWI (1914) came close to total ethnic cleansing of the Assyrian population in the regions of Tur-Abdin and Hakkari.



The event took place at Santa Clara University and was well-attended; in fact, the Music & Dance Recital Hall turned out to be too small. There were many informative speeches and presentations by a number of speakers from various Assyrian organizations and political parties, all gathered at the University of Santa Clara. The hall was filled with hundreds of community members who showed up to pay their respect and commemorate the heroes of the Assyrian nation, who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their nation.

The speeches were about the sufferings of the Assyrian people during the last 200 years; the massacres like that which took place in Simele in 1933; sufferings, discriminations and total

Resilience and survival became the living goal of the Assyrians during these dark periods, which led to the scattering of the Assyrian people around the world. The Genocide of 1914 (also called "Seyfo") weakened the Assyrian nation and brought it to the verge of extinction as an ethnic group.

The program became very emotional, during the silent theatrical play performed by the organizing youth group. During the program a slideshow was presented, showing some of the horror experienced by our people during the Genocide in 1914, Simele Massacre in 1933 and many others.

The Assyrian Foundation of America was among the participating organizations represented by its President Mr. Fredy Tamraz (his speech was in Assyrian and can be found in the Assyrian section of this issue).

Assyrian Martyr's Day Commemoration 2008

A Real First person's recollection on the Assyrian Nation's fight against oppression and genocide

FEATURING:
 POETRY
 LECTURE
 THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE
 CANDLELIGHT VIGIL
 SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKERS
 and MORE...

Thursday Aug 7th, 2008
Santa Clara University:
 Music & Dance Recital Hall
 on the corner of Franklin St.
 and Linderoth St.
 Santa Clara, CA 95053

Free Admission and Food!!

With Participating From:
 Assyrian Academic Society, Assyrian American Association of San Jose, Assyrian Church of the East, Assyrian Democratic Movement, Assyrian Evangelical Church of San Jose, Assyrian Foundation of America, Assyrian Universal Alliance, All US Assyrian Church

Assyrian Woman Must Fight For Her Rights

The reason Afamia (Nahrin) Maraha, 32, from Södertälje, Sweden, joined the Assyrian Women's Federation (Assyriska Kvinnoförbundet, AKF, in Swedish) is simple: she likes change.



AFAMIA MARAHA,
President of the Assyrian
Women's Federation

I saw that there was a will to do something new, to push the Federation to a different level. The women wanted to entice the younger generation to get involved and to bring back those who had been active in the organization in the past, and, like me, liked the thought of processes of change, she says.

Afamia has been working with AKF for the past four years, but she has always been active in different Assyrian organizations. A year ago she was elected president of the AKF, because she is hardworking, creative and a role model for her peers and the younger generation. She is an ethnologist who has done considerable amount of worked on issues concerning equality in the Swedish society and she brings her experience to AKF.

Something that is very important to Afamia is overall equality between men and women and the woman's struggle to achieve it. Coming from a culture where it is mostly men who have been in the leadership positions of the different associations and unions, she feels compelled to work for change.



could be part of the public sphere. Some 30 years ago, men dominated that area, which is what the women wanted to change.

It began as a women's committee on a local level which developed into the Assyrian Women's National Federation as part of the Assyrian Federation of Sweden (ARS). The reason they are not totally independent is the insufficient number of members. Out of the Assyrian national federation's 8,000 members about 3,000 are AKF members. But that is still not enough.

Part of the fee that the local associations pay goes to us, but we still need more members who pay a separate fee to us. However, we do have our own account and yearly meetings and we choose a new board of directors every other year. We also have our own constitution and guidelines so we are 99 percent independent, Afamia says.

The goal for AKF is to be a uniting body for the 25 local Assyrian associations and the women's board of directors in these local Assyrian associations. AKF wants to be their united voice and speak for them on different issues concerning women on a national level.

Now, they are trying to recruit younger members to the board because it is the youth that has to continue the struggle for equality, among other things, Afamia says.

Today, we have three women in the board of directors of the Assyrian Women's Federation (AKF) who are in their 30s or younger, which is good. Currently, AKF is working on a project called Equality Now! It is a project divided into three parts with the goal of finding out why few women have positions on the board of directors, what obstacles they might encounter, how we can raise the question to a discussion and get a clear picture, she says.

Mapping this out is step one. In the past 20 years, only eight percent of the leading positions in the Assyrian Federation have been held by women. As a result of this survey it is now confirmed that there are insufficiencies in the system that doesn't support women to become active.

I feel the same way the founders to AKF did; more women need to be active, involved and visible in the different boards of our organizations, she says.

AKF developed out of these ideas in the 1980s as a project with the goal of strengthening the woman so that she



Women's Summer camp 2007:
raising the Assyrian flag.

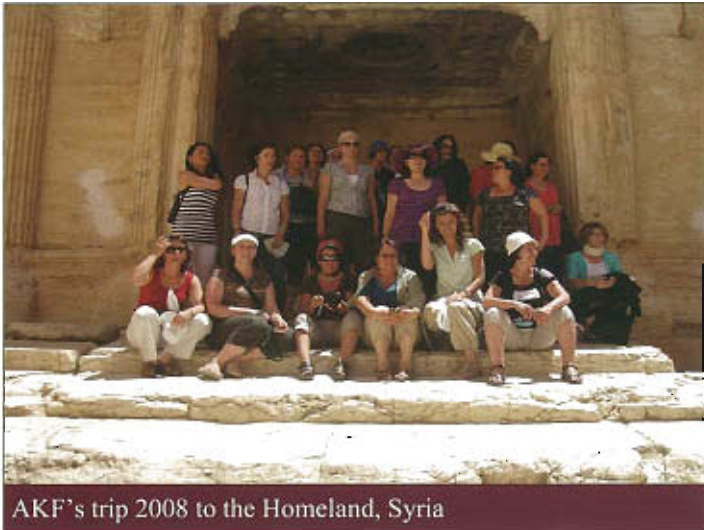
The second step is to hold seminars to raise awareness of the inequality and the third step is to put it all together in writing in the form of a book.

The idea is to apply different solutions or methods to obtain equality. It will also show how the Assyrian woman

dent of the Assyrian Federation is a female, as was the previous one. The Assyrian association, which is the largest local association in Sweden, also has a chairwoman as its President. This is how we know that we are on the right track, she says.

Aside from the different projects, AKF has many other activities, such as seminars, lectures, short courses and workshops. The questions they discuss range from equality, identity, integrity, social and cultural issues, to other educational questions. They also have a summer camp once a year and weekend courses twice a year only for women.

This summer (2008), 22 women went to Syria and Tur'abdin in Turkey. It is a way for us to create a dialog with other women abroad and work together, Afamia says.



AKF's trip 2008 to the Homeland, Syria

has contributed to the development both in the organizational activities and in the culture. They want to show this development in the past three generations and look at the different conditions and obstacles each generation faced.

Some people don't know what to do in order to evolve and create equal opportunities for men and women, boys and girls and that is where the book comes in. It is suppose to guide them and give them tools to improve, Afamia says.

The project, *Equality now!*, started in 2006 (when Afamia was a chairwoman of the AKF board) a year be-



AKF's trip to Homeland 2008

About 20 years ago, AKF was working on a national level. Today, they are working on an international level with women in Europe, Turkey, Germany, The Netherlands, United Kingdom and the homeland. AKF visits them, exchanges ideas, knowledge and experiences and they help each other in their struggle to strengthen the Assyrian woman, appreciate her and make known her input in the overall development of the Assyrian people.

Their projects are financed with various public funds. Another project that the AKF has received funds for is a song, dance and play book in Assyrian.

We have put collected some old Assyrian games, which we explain how you play. We have also gathered 30 old traditional Assyrian songs and some old Assyrian dances that come with instructions on a DVD, she says.

The book will be in Assyrian, using both Assyrian and Latin script.

Afamia is very excited about all the projects they are doing now and she hopes that AKF continues developing. She doesn't know for how long she will continue as the President, but she knows that she enjoys it and that there still is a lot of work to do because these strong and creative Assyrian women always find new challenges.



AKF's trip to Homeland 2008, Tur'abdin, Turkey

fore she became the president of the AKF; she says that it will take a long time before one can see results.

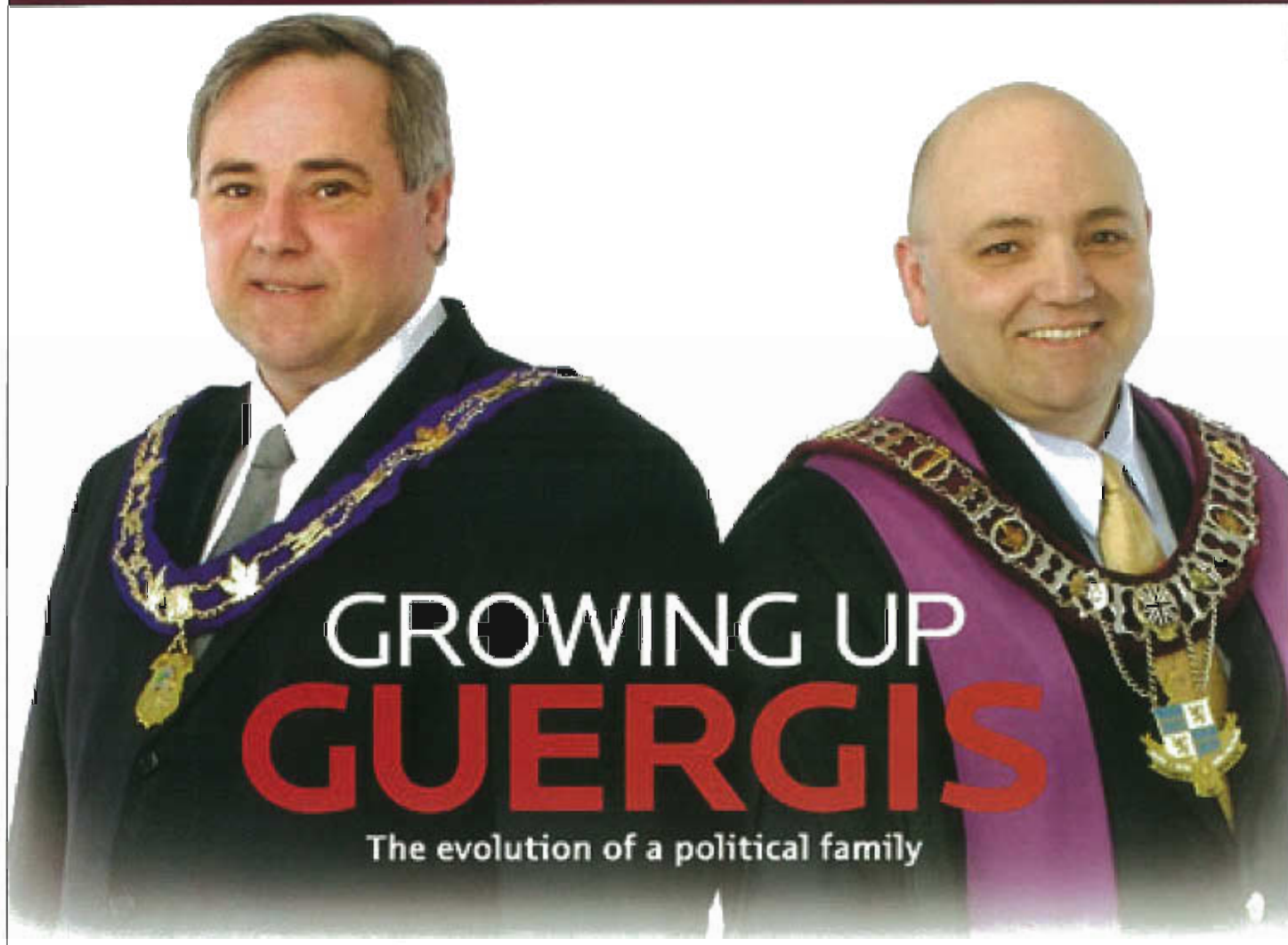
Other changes that we can see today are that the Presi-

Growing up Guergis

- The Evolution of a Political Family

By Barry Ward

<http://www.simcoelife.ca>



Almost a century ago, a boy was born in a remote, dusty corner of the Middle East where the modern nations of Turkey, Iran and Iraq meet. From those humble beginnings, a Simcoe County political dynasty arose.

Within a year, the young boy's father left to establish himself in North America. He couldn't have imagined what his family would have to endure before he was able to return. The First World War broke out. It was to have unforeseen consequences, even in that out-of-the-way corner of the world. The family was Assyrian, a sizable minority in the Middle East. The Assyrians sided with the British in the war, hoping it would win them their own country at the end of the conflict. That angered the ruling Turks, making them enemies and leading to persecution and unimaginable atrocities. The family spent the war in refugee camps or hiding in the mountains, living in caves

for months at a time. Rose, the first born daughter, died and had to be buried in a roadside grave.

It was to be a decade before the father was able to return



to collect his wife and son to bring them to a new life in Canada. Eventually, the father would become a pillar of the Angus community and the boy, George Guergis, would emerge as a leader of Angus business and establish the foundation of what was to become a political juggernaut.

The Guergis family has had many political triumphs but the past year is likely the most successful in their history. It all began with Helena Guergis winning her second term as federal member of parliament for Simcoe-Grey. Unlike her first victory in 2004, when she squeaked through by exactly 100 votes, Helena trounced her nearest opponent by a margin of more than 11,000.

Later in the year, her cousin David Guergis was acclaimed to his second term as mayor of Essa Township. His brother, Tony Guergis, wasn't as fortunate. He actually had to campaign. In early November, he won his first election for mayor of neighbouring Springwater Township in a landslide (he had been deputy mayor but moved up to acting mayor a few months earlier upon the death of the incumbent). A month later, Tony put another feather in his cap when he was acclaimed as the 145th warden in the history of Simcoe County. To top it all off, Helena celebrated the first anniversary of her re-election by being named to the federal cabinet as a secretary of state with responsibilities for foreign affairs, international trade and sport.

And then there is Helena's sister, Christine Brayford. She has just launched a career in politics but topped the polls and became a Ward One representative on New Tecumseth Township council. Clearly, if Simcoe County has a first family of politics, someone comparable at the local level to the Kennedy dynasty in the United States, it is the Guergis clan. The current generation is just following in the footsteps of George Guergis, reeve of Essa Township in the 1970s, and his son, Ed Guergis, a township councillor and deputy reeve 10 years later. Helena and Christine are George's granddaughters and Ed's nieces. Tony and David are the sons of David, another one of George's chil-

dren.

This is a family that takes its lineage seriously. In his inaugural address upon being named Simcoe County warden last December, Tony Guergis decided to depart from the usual practice of outlining goals for the upcoming year to spend time honouring his grandfather, who brought the Guergis name to Canada back in 1912. Tony called it "a true Canadian story and, indeed, a real Simcoe County story."

Karam Guergis was born in 1892 in a little town called Mar Zaya in Turkey. He was Assyrian, a people who had once formed one of the world's first great civilizations but were now a minority Christian group, surrounded by a Muslim majority. Karam was an excellent student. That won him entry to an American Presbyterian College and, later, backing to come to the United States to study medicine. To do so, he had to leave behind his wife Tarlan, infant son and young daughter.

Upon arriving in North America, Karam changed his mind and ended up crossing the border into Canada almost immediately, becoming a theology student and graduating in 1915. After more studies, he was ordained into the Presbyterian Church of Canada in Montreal and sent to serve on a Saskatchewan mission. It was not until 1923 that he was in a position to return to his homeland to find his family.

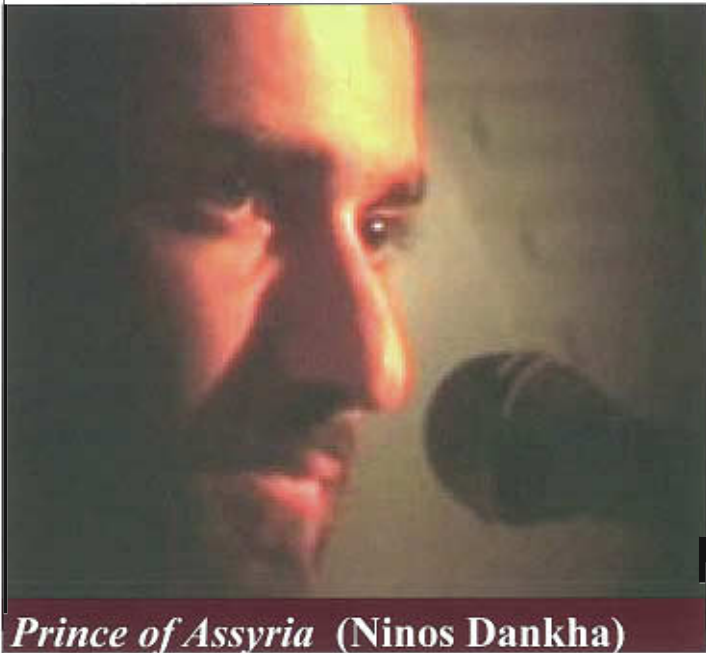
Karam returned with them to Canada, living the minister's life of moving between congregations, first back to Saskatchewan, then to the East Coast and finally settling in Angus in 1949 where he spent a decade at Zion Presbyterian Church, along with filling in at other churches in the area. There was to be one more move to Bracebridge for Karam and several of the clan ended up moving back to Prince Edward Island (where one cousin ran unsuccessfully in the last federal election) but the family roots were firmly planted in Angus. By then, there were another six children: Frances, Helen, Esther, Sargon, David and Victoria. George, the only surviving child who had been born in Turkey, had actually been the first to make the move to Simcoe County, working hard and establishing himself as an extremely successful Angus businessman with a grocery store near the entrance to Base Borden. The property was eventually developed into the Rainbow Mall, housing a furniture store, restaurant and more.

Tony remembers his grandfather, Karam, as an extremely serious man who was devoted to his family and his ministry. He spoke five languages and spent his spare time reading. Gardening seemed to be his only hobby. "He was very strict, I'll tell you that. There was no dancing, no playing cards."

So it may seem somewhat unusual that so many of his descendants took up politics rather than becoming men of the cloth. But Tony said it is, in many ways, a natural pro-

(Continued on page 32)





Prince of Assyria (Ninos Dankha)

For the last three years Ninos has been working with music and since August last year using the name *Prince of Assyria*.

Prince of Assyria was born in Baghdad, but the family moved to Sweden when he was one year old. Like many young Assyrians, he grew up involved in Assyrian associations and he expresses the importance of his Assyrian identity; not the least in the music he produces. He gets his inspiration from Leonard Cohen, David Bowie and from the Assyrian singer Ashur Bet Sargis as well as other Assyrian musicians.

- *My Assyrian identity is very important and plays a significant role in the music I produce; Assyrians have a long history and a great culture that contains every thing from music, architecture, art etc. But, we have lost a part of our culture; we have lost some of the joy that we had in the past. The genuine culture is not shown anymore. Today we are good businessmen, although we have so much more to offer and so much more to give.*

Ninos Dankha never made an attempt to be discovered as an artist; if anything, the music has been a way for him to express himself. Yet it didn't take too long before he was discovered. The record label Kning Disc discovered his music at myspace.com, and since then things have been going his way.

What do you see for yourself as an artist in the year 2008?

The future is bright, he says laughing. My first album will be out in stores by the end of march. Besides Sweden the album will be released in the US as well as in Japan. My single debut "Whatever you want" will be available as single/vinyl soon.

Will there be another album for us to expect?

- *Yes, I have already started working on my second al-*

bum. I want to keep on writing music, continue to deliver and affect people with my lyrics. That in itself is a challenge. To write and compose music is a challenge and in order to succeed one has to have a down-to-earth attitude.

A prince in exile

Since his family left Baghdad for Sweden, Ninos Dankha has visited his homeland, Bethnahrin, only once. In the near future he will once again visit northern Iraq and, together with the Swedish Television channel, SVT, make a documentary; a charming story about a prince in exile.



Aril Brikha,

Assyrian electronic music artist, Aril Brikha, was nominated for Best Dance album in the Swedish National radio Gold Gala award. Some of his fans go wild whenever he plays, chanting out his name and overpowering the huge sound systems.

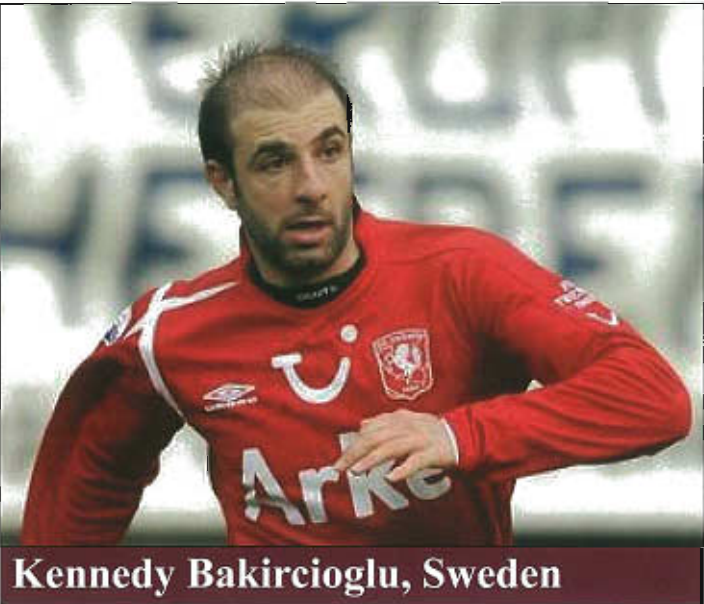
Aril Brikha, born in Iran in 1976 but raised in Sweden since the age of 4, is one of the biggest names in Techno music, especially within the Detroit Techno generation. He is signed on one of the world's most legendary labels called Transmat, working side by side with The Godfather of techno, Dereck May.

Aril Brikha is a producer from Stockholm who initially discovered electronic music listening to the likes of Depeche Mode, Front 242 and Jean Michel Jarre before discovering the more futuristic sounds of the likes of Robert Hood and Underground Resistance. He sent a demo to some of his favorite record labels Stateside. Before he knew it Derrick May released *The Art Of Vengeance* EP featuring the track *Groove La Chord* on his Fragile record label and was playing it all around the world. This was followed by the release of the *Departure In Time* album also on Transmat. His livesets has been highly acclaimed all the way from DEMF in Detroit to Fabric in London, playing his take on techno with his special soul and funk to it.



Sanharib Sabah Malki, Belgium

Sanharib Malki, is a talented Assyrian soccer (football) player who was born on 01/03/1984 in the city of Qamsihly, Syria. He immigrated to Belgium where he continued to pursue his soccer dream and joined the ranks of Germinal Beerschot, one of the top professional teams in Belgium. Sanharib Malki is one of the top goal scorers in the Belgian Premier League, Erste Klasse .



Kennedy Bakircioglu, Sweden

Kennedy Bakircioglu, 26 year-old Assyrian soccer talent developed his skills when he started, at the age of six in the Assyrian Soccer Club (AFF) in Sodertalje, Sweden, the city he was born in. In 1999, he was bought and transferred from the Assyrian team, Assyriska, to another Swedish team named Hammarby IF, in Stockholm. He also played for one year for the Greek team, Iraklis. As a 24 year old talent he was bought by the Dutch team, Twente FC. And in 2008 he was bought by the Dutch soccer club, AJAX. He has also played in several international games as a member of the Swedish national team.

Emory Names Inaugural Robert T. Jones Fellow

Emory University senior David Abraham has been named the first recipient of the Robert T. Jones Jr. Fellowship at Emory for fully funded graduate study at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland. St. Andrews, founded in 1411, is Emory's sister institution.



David Abraham, USA

Abraham, of Marietta, Ga., will begin his studies in fall 2008 in the School of Philosophy at St. Andrews.

The Robert T. Jones Jr. Fellowship is a new award established at Emory this year that covers tuition and provides a living stipend for one to four years of graduate work at St. Andrews. It is to be given each year to one graduating senior or graduate student with a record of intellectual excellence and academic interests that can be pursued at St. Andrews. Unlike the popular Robert T. Jones Scholarship awarded annually to four Emory students for a year of study at St. Andrews, the fellows are required to earn a graduate degree.

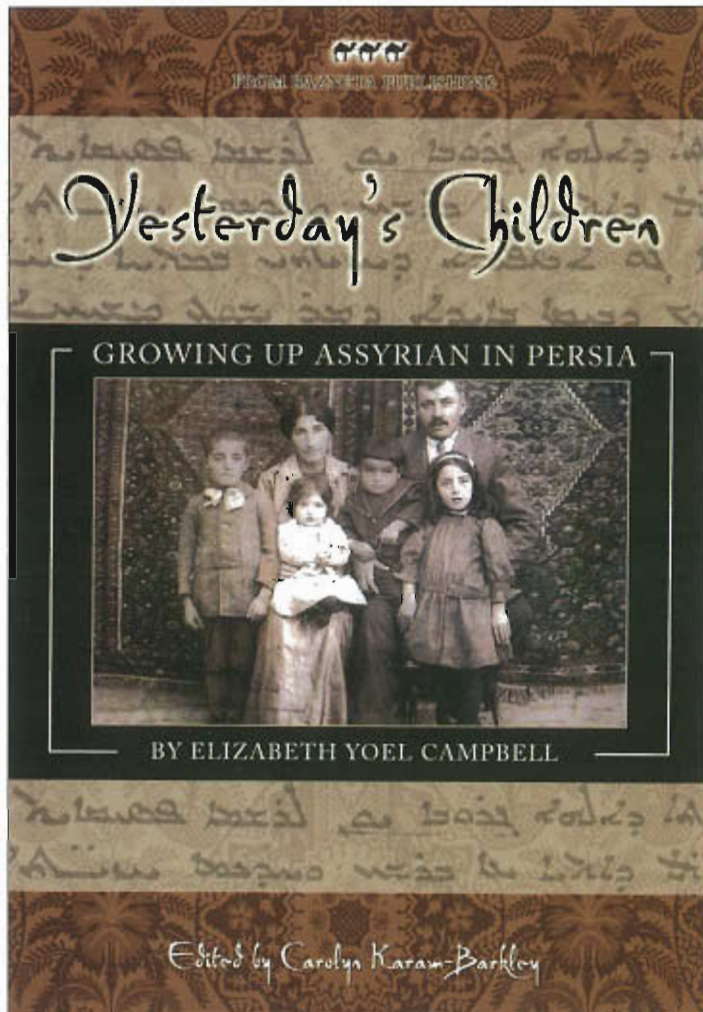
Abraham plans to seek a master's degree in philosophy at St. Andrews, a two-year degree program, and study Thomas Aquinas and medieval philosophy. At Emory, Abraham is a philosophy and history major who is completing an honors thesis on the history of Edmund Burke.

Abraham is the recipient of numerous academic honors:

- At the end of his freshman year, he was selected to receive the Goodrich C. White Scholarship;
- He was a SIRE (Scholarly Inquiry and Research at Emory) scholar last summer;
- He is the recipient of the Charles Hartshorne Essay Prize in philosophy at Emory; and,
- He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and both the history and philosophy honor societies.

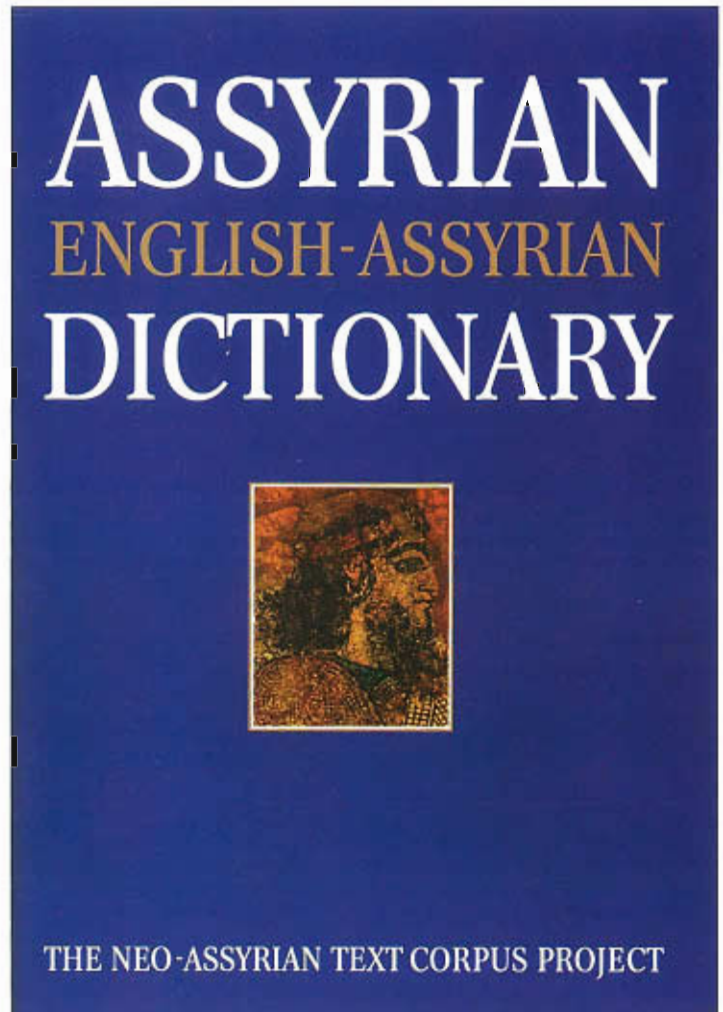
Abraham was selected by Emory as one of three finalists; the final selection was made by St. Andrews. The fellowship seeks to honor the late Robert T. Jones, Jr., an internationally renowned golfer and Emory Law School alumnus remembered by those who knew him as an extraordinary man of rare loyalty, compassion and integrity.

New Books



Elizabeth Yoel Campbell's retrospective look at her childhood in early twentieth century Persia is a fresh view of lifestyle, culture, politics, and religion in the Middle East. It is a perspective rarely heard about a people little known in modern history, and about an era that has influenced today's Middle Eastern politics.

Elizabeth Yoel Campbell was born in Tabriz, Iran, in 1915. She spent the first eight years of her life in Maragha, Iran. At the age of eight her family moved to Tabriz where Elizabeth attended the American College for Girls, graduating in 1931. She also studied music during that time and taught piano for many years. After graduating from college, she was employed by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company where she taught English to Iranians. Yoel Campbell has lived in Australia since 1952. Her Niece, Carolyn Karam-Barkley, lives in Charlottesville, Virginia with her husband and son.



This dictionary focuses on the vocabulary of the Neo-Assyrian period, which it seeks to present as completely and accurately as possible. In this, it follows the model of contemporary-language dictionaries, which likewise basically focus on just one language period (the contemporary one) instead of many. The aim has been to create a tool that can be profitably used not only for studying texts from the Neo-Assyrian period but also for composing new texts in the relevant languages, be it for purposes of experimental research and teaching, or simply for fun.

The dictionary contains all the words and phrases attested in Assyrian texts composed in the Neo-Assyrian period, including royal inscriptions and other texts written in Standard Akkadian. Words attested in Neo-Assyrian personal names only have also been taken into consideration, but with the exception of month names, only a few proper nouns have been included.

In all, the dictionary contains about 13,000 Assyrian entries and about 23,000 English entries.

Description

Many scholars, in the U.S. and elsewhere, have decried the racism and “Orientalism” that characterizes much Western writing on the Middle East. Such writings conflate different peoples and nations, and movements within such peoples and nations, into unitary and malevolent hordes, uncivilized reservoirs of danger, while ignoring or downplaying analogous tendencies towards conformity or barbarism in other regions, including the West. Assyrians in particular suffer from Old Testament and pop culture references to their barbarity and cruelty, which ignore or downplay massacres or torture by the Judeans, Greeks, and Romans who are celebrated by history as ancestors of the West. This work, through its rich depictions of tribal and religious diversity within Mesopotamia, may help serve as a corrective to this tendency of contemporary writing on the Middle East and the Assyrians in particular. Furthermore, Aboona’s work also steps away from the age-old oversimplified rubric of an “Arab Muslim” Middle East, and into the cultural mosaic that is more representative of the region.

In this book, author Hirmis Aboona presents compelling research from numerous primary sources in English, Arabic, and Syriac on the ancient origins, modern struggles, and distinctive culture of the Assyrian tribes living in northern Mesopotamia, from the plains of Nineveh north and east to southeastern Anatolia and the Lake Urmia region. Among other findings, this book debunks the tendency of modern scholars to question the continuity of the Assyrian identity to the modern day by confirming that the Assyrians of northern Mesopotamia told some of the earliest English and American visitors to the region that they descended from the ancient Assyrians and that their churches and identity predated the Arab conquest. It details how the Assyrian tribes of the mountain dioceses of the “Nestorian” Church of the East maintained a surprising degree of independence until the Ottoman governor of Mosul authorized Kurdish militia to attack and subjugate or evict them.

Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans is a work that will be of great interest and use to scholars of history, Middle Eastern studies, international relations, and anthropology.

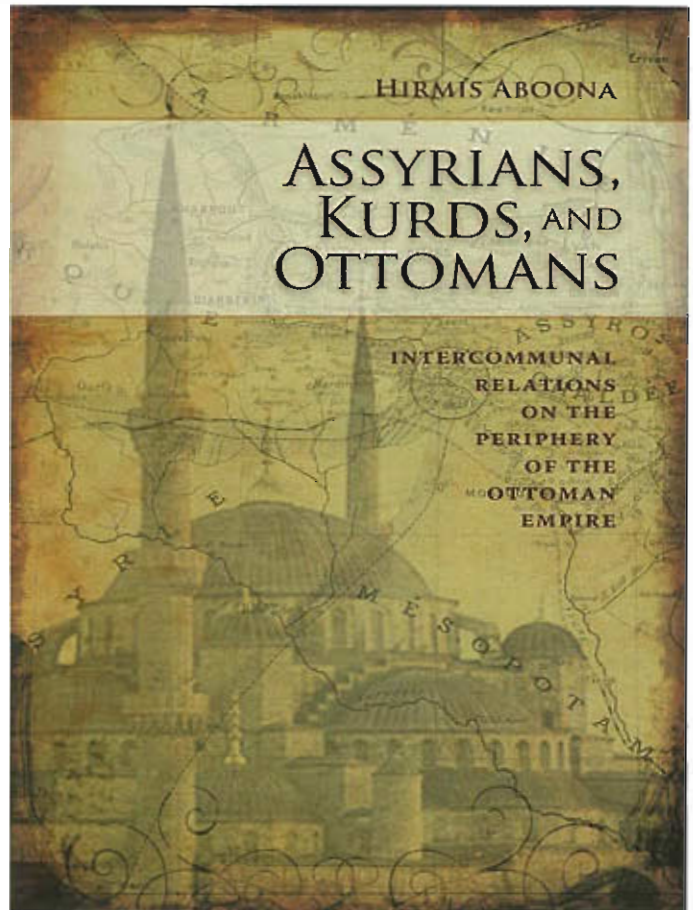
ISBN: 9781604975833, Pages: 500

About Author

Hirmis Aboona is the author of several books on the ancient and modern history of the Assyrian people. His articles and books often deal with the most contemplative subjects as the origin of the Assyrian ethnicity and the emergence of more recent doctrines and political ideologies among Assyrian groups. Dr. Aboona holds a PhD from the University of Exeter, and has lectured at universities, including the University of Sydney, University of Cambridge, as well as various universities in Syria and Lebanon.

Reviews

"This book will stand as lasting contribution to the history of Christianity in Asia, of the Ottoman Empire, and of one of the



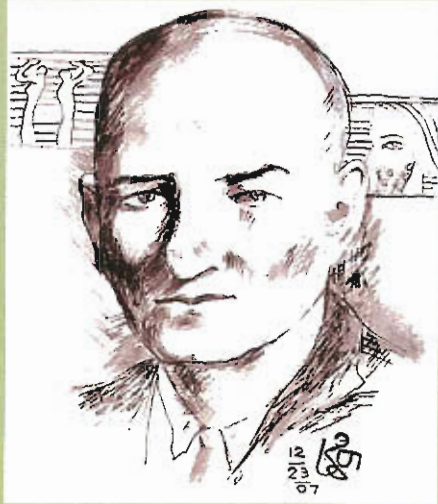
Middle East’s largest ethnic and religious minorities.” - Hannibal Travis, Visiting Associate Professor, Villanova University School of Law, and Sargon George Donabed, University of Toronto

Table of Contents

- Preface
- Chapter 1: The Homeland and Origin of the Independent Assyrian Tribes of Tiyari and Hakkari
- Chapter 2: Church, State, and Social Life
- Chapter 3: The History of the Church of the East Down to the Arrival of the Roman Catholic Missionaries
- Chapter 4: Missionaries and Their Impact on the Assyrians
- Chapter 5: The Kurdish Settlement in Ancient Assyria
- Chapter 6: The Ottoman Reforms
- Chapter 7: The Reforms and the People of the Book
- Chapter 8: The Beginnings of Centralisation
- Chapter 9: Beirakdar and the Achievement of Centralisation
- Chapter 10: The Subjection of the Assyrian Tribes in 1843
- Chapter 11: Great Britain, the Ottomans, and the Assyrian Tragedy
- Chapter 12: Tekhoma: The Last Assyrian Independent Province
- Chapter 13: The End of the Kurdish Wars
- Chapter 14: Conclusion
- Appendices
- Bibliography
- Index

<http://www.cambriapress.com/books/9781604975833.cfm>

تتميز ذهبية



تتميز ذهبية

BINYAMIN ARSANIS

Binyamin Arsanis (1884-1957) was a sincere patriot, famous orator and respected writer. He has written many educational, literary and historical books in modern Assyrian. A number of these books were published during the first half of the last century; however, many of his manuscripts have been lost. In this volume, Youel A. Baaba has collected, edited, annotated and written special commentaries on twelve of his books. Additionally, he has written his biography. This book of 464 pages is a remarkable achievement and the first of its kind in which the extant writings of an Assyrian author can be found in a single volume. Arsanis books included in this volume are, Teaching Assyrian Language (2 volumes), Assyrian Proverbs, Book of Riddles, A short story, The Fall of Assyrian Empire, Assyrian Monument in China, Prophet Mohammed's Documents, Assyrian Accomplishments in Asia, The Tragedy of 2,000 Assyrian Maidens, Rescue of Iran, Assyrian History Relative to Kurds.

This book can be ordered from: <http://www.lulu.com/content/2348796>

Price \$18.99

GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Youel and Alice Baaba celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary on January 18, 2008. Their children, Raman and Sargina gave a dinner dance party at Scotts Restaurant in Walnut Creek where about 70 relatives and friends attended the celebration. A number of relatives came from out of town and out of state.

His Grace Bishop Mar Bawai blessed the occasion and spoke kindly about the couple and praised their contributions to the Assyrian community.

Youel and Alice were married in Los Angeles area on December 21, 1957. They met while they were neighbors in Baghdad, Iraq. They are blessed with a son, Raman, and daughter, Sargina. They have four grandchildren. Raman and his wife Diana have Nicole aged nine and Ryan aged five. Sargina has Michael aged 23 who graduated last year from UC Santa Cruz with a degree in music and Ashley aged 21 who is in college



Back row: Michael, Youel, Alice, Ashley
Front row: Ryan, Nicole



Back row left to right: Raman, Diana, Sargina, Ashley, Michael
Front row left to right: Ryan, Youel, Alice, Nicole

Isabell Ishtar Michaels

<http://isabellishtar.com>

Isabell Ishtar Michaels was born in June, 1998, to Samir Michaels and Marina Benjamin. She has a younger brother, Antonio Sargon, who is 5. Her hobbies include reading, writing, acting, swimming, and singing. Isabell also loves to make new friends.

Isabell showed a special talent for language at an early age when, at two, she appeared on stage, reciting her first poem in Assyrian. Since then, she has been reciting poems



Isabell's latest CD (2007), with Christmas songs in English and Assyrian.

in the Valentine Poetry Night in Chicago, IL. This is no surprise since one of her role models was her late grandfather, Rabi Akhtiyar Benjamin. He was a teacher with a great command of the Assyrian language who instilled in her the love for her mother tongue. She still treasures the times they had together and the enormous influence he had in her life.

However, Isabell's talent does not stop at language. She is also a talented singer who started taking lessons at the age of six. Presently, she is a soloist in the Assyrian Church of the East Choir.

Isabell has appeared on several television and radio interviews. She was also a guest singer on *Assyrian Super*

Star, held in Chicago in 2006. Further, Isabell appeared in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* with the Overshadow Theatrical Production. And recently, Isabell released her first CD, "*Christmas with Isabell*".

Isabell attends Waterbury Elementary School in Roselle and is in fourth grade. She has always been an excellent student and loves her school.

Isabell has dedicated her CD to all the Assyrian children in the world and her special message to them is to learn their language, practice it and treasure it. Although we are a nation with no country, we have a rich language with ancient roots that helps unite our people in Diaspora.

How old are you?

I am 10 years old

When did you discover that you liked singing?

I have loved music for as long as I remember; because my mom used to always play Baby Mozart for me. I guess I discovered music when I was 4 years old, but I joined church choir as a soloist when I was 5. I have been taking private lessons since I was 6 years old because I take music very seriously.

Did someone in the family encourage you to sing?

Yes, my mom. She discovered my talent and encouraged it and she always stood by me. I also want to thank all my Assyrian family and friends who have encouraged me.

Why a CD with Christmas songs in Assyrian?

Since we all know these songs, and I would like all the Assyrian kids to learn and speak our language.

Are you working on another project? Another CD?

Yes, I'm working on something, but it's far from being completed. I hope you'll like it when it's done.



My American Assyrian Experience

By: Tamara Odisho-Benjamin, San Francisco



I was born and raised in New Jersey to immigrant Assyrian parents. Although they came to America from different countries and at different times in their lives they came knowing one thing, they were proud of being Assyrian.

As they raised three daughters in a city and country foreign to their customs, they made sure we knew our roots. They talked about our grandparents and other family members. Summers as far as I remember were spent with dad's family in Turlock, California, where aunts and uncles would dote on us and test our Assyrian. "Can you count past 100 in Assyrian?" "I bet my son can", one aunt would say. I don't think any of us really cared, but we learned. We made Assyrian friends but the summer quickly ended and it was back to New Jersey, where no one knew what we were. I remember one instance in 4th grade, when my teacher asked my dad what Assyrians were and in his broken English he said, "We are Babylonian." She was quick to say she knew what that was. He knew we weren't but walked away whispering to me, "Did she go to college?"

Something about teaching people made it exciting to learn about our ancient people. I was a pro at throwing B.C. dates around and explaining the different groups of people we ruled over and conquered. Of course I was shy about telling people how it ended.

My parents really deserve the credit. They persistently hounded us to speak Assyrian to each other, especially at home. Many times it was them talking in Assyrian and us responding in English; a learning lesson for all, since they improved their English and us our Assyrian. Mom was a full-time house wife. She did it all alone, she still amazes me. Dad worked hard, very hard. He would sometimes work the weekends for the overtime. They struggled but we girls never had a clue, since we had it all. The American dream is what many call it; loving parents, a home,

car, parochial school education, food in the fridge and always a warm meal on the table. What more could any kid want? Growing up I always remember dad telling us, "blood is thicker than water, you don't leave this house without the other." We never did. My middle sister, Tanya, and I were always together. It was great to be forced to make your sibling your best friend. Of course we argued but we always made up.

Although their English wasn't great, my parents really made life in America work for them. Since I was more fluent in English they came to me for help with documents, bills and the check book. Boy did I dread balancing that book. If I had any of the foresight my parents did by making me in charge of the bills, I would have a better credit score. But you live and learn.

After coming home from our Turlock trips, mom and dad would always promise us, "we are moving there next summer." (They still live in New Jersey) It was hard being alone for mom and dad. They didn't have many friends and really wanted us to have Assyrian friends more than 3 months out of the year. Growing-up, they both lived with blocks of their cousins. All we knew of our cousins were short summer trips and Christmas photos. We got creative and adopted our friends' family members. We learned new customs and traditions, all while still being accepted for who we were.

Occasionally we went to Assyrian church in Yonkers, NY. They had a small community of Assyrians that we enjoyed visiting. But sadly, it was only a few hours on a Sunday and then back over the bridge to New Jersey.

After graduating college in 2002, I decided to move to Los Angeles with my younger sister. Tina was in her second year in college there and I was ready for a change. What I was about to experience was one of the greatest milestones in my life. Turns out the city of Northridge, where we moved to, was a sub-mecca for Assyrians. It was my dream; we had an Assyrian club and church within 15 minutes of our place. I quickly made friends with anyone that accepted my friendship. I was the new kid on the block and I volunteered at the club and became the opening anchor for the Assyrian news channel, which aired Sunday evenings. Fresh to the world of Assyrian democracy, I quickly hit the "man wall." The aging popu-

lation of Assyrian men that weren't open to change. It was unfortunate, but I moved on. There was a newsletter that I contributed to for a time and that was a positive experience but there were only so many parties and events to cover. There was more to LA than just the Assyrians. It was a melting pot, unlike New York, LA's ethnic groups hung out together. There were the Jews, Armenians, Koreans, Latinos and us. I learned a great deal from these groups especially the first two. I never saw camaraderie of this kind. I wish Assyrians stuck together so cohesively. It seemed like there was always more infighting than peace, maybe a genetic trait from our tribal background? It began to turn me off, I wasn't so *gung-ho* about being Assyrian. The girls and I didn't go to as many parties, but we stayed together. We created our own group, a sad dividing reality of our dying race. My friends already knew but it was part of my growth as the "newbie".

Three years later I was on the road again. After my stint in LA, I was offered a job in Sacramento. An opportunity I couldn't pass, although Tina thinks differently. As with my move to LA, I gave myself no time to mull it over and just packed all my things and left. Sacramento reminded

me of New Jersey. From the friendly neighbors to the one way street I grew up on and of course I got the seasons back. But like New Jersey, there were no Assyrians in Sac. It was interesting to experience this feeling again, but this time I was older and lived my As-

syrian dream. Maybe it was my destiny to move on and not be around Assyrians? But what did I know? I was only 70 miles from the family in Turlock, so I could come and go as I pleased and it was a nice balance. What I lacked and missed most was my immediate family. The same people I thought I needed to leave to find myself.

One summer while in Sac, my LA friend introduced me to MySpace, an online social network community, which helped connect me to friends and family. It ultimately connected me and my husband too. Turns out there are Assyrians everywhere. There he was on this site, this

handsome cup of sugar, that I wanted to eat up. When I saw where he lived I nearly fell out of my chair. I quickly sent him an email and we were sending messages back and forth before ultimately meeting. I remember that week vividly. (We were quick to spot a good thing.) When we both told our parents we had met one another I think both sets of parents practically fainted. Here we were two Assyrian-Americans from different parts of the country connected by the internet and divided by 90 miles. Could it be? We were engaged within 6 months and married less than a year later. It was my very own fairytale. Although before meeting Paul, I lost hope and confidence in finding an Assyrian partner. There just aren't too many equitable males out there. At least not many who mingle within the community. I understand there's drama that many of us don't want to be a part of and there is nothing wrong with marrying outside the race, but why not come around once in a while? I have this conversation too frequently with friends, who want to meet good Assyrian guys.

After meeting Paul, a third generation San Franciscan, I moved to San Francisco. There's a small but close knit Assyrian community here. I think it's the perfect balance of it all.



To explain what I have learned in my short lived life would normally be hard to tell. But after writing it all down, I have come to realize that we have some hand in our fate. We may not be able to choose the family we are born into, but we choose to make the experience worth living. I always knew I belonged to a greater people. I

found them in LA. Needing to fulfill my career I moved to Sacramento. Finding true happiness I got an account on MySpace. It has been a rollercoaster of travelling from coast to coast, but it's an experience I encourage everyone to explore. Especially in a country with so many opportunities and allowances for personal and religious freedoms. I believe the key to life is balance. It's like a pot of stew, just enough salt, tomato and meat makes for a memorable dish. A pinch too much or too little of either and its not perfect. I always associated ethnic groups with a country, but in a melting pot like America, I have learned I am home here as an Assyrian-American, so I have stopped looking.

MONUMENTAL ARTWORK FROM ANCIENT ASSYRIAN PALACES HERALDED IN
ART AND EMPIRE: TREASURES FROM ASSYRIA IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM, AT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

"The former city of Kalhu I built anew. I built therein a palace with halls of cedar, cypress, juniper, boxwood, teak, terebinth, and tamarisk as my royal dwelling and for the enduring leisure life of my lordship. Silver, gold, tin, bronze, iron, my own booty from the lands over which I ruled, I placed it all therein."

-From the "Standard Inscription" of Ashurnasirpal II

BOSTON, MA (July 18, 2008)—Ashurnasirpal II, Assyria's self-proclaimed "great king, mighty king, king of the universe," invited 70,000 guests to a 10-day housewarming party in 860 BC to show off his impressive new home at Kalhu. Constructed on 900 acres in northern Assyria—now modern-day Iraq—it was the most magnificent palace the ancient Near East had ever seen. Almost three thousand years later, visitors to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), will also marvel at the wondrous decorations that adorned Ashurnasirpal II's North-West Palace when the exhibition, *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum*, goes on view in the Gund Gallery at the MFA from September 21, 2008–January 4, 2009. This exhibition showcases 250 objects from the British Museum, which has the finest collection of Assyrian art outside of Iraq, found in palaces and temples dating from the 9–7th centuries BC located at Kalhu (present-day Nimrud) and Nineveh along the Tigris River in northern Iraq. *Art and Empire* is collaboration between the British Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

"The Neo-Assyrian empire—which encompassed much of today's Middle East—represents a fascinating period, and this exhibition highlights the grand palaces, monumental wall reliefs, and rare artifacts of its kings," said Malcolm Rogers, Ann and Graham Gund Director of the MFA. "This spectacular collection also gives visitors the opportunity to explore the power, majesty, and sophistication of an ancient civilization that was little understood until it was rediscovered by archeologists less than two centuries ago."

Art and Empire chronicles Assyria's rise from a small landlocked kingdom in northern Mesopotamia to a magnificent empire stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea. Its territories encompassed all of present-day Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, as well as large parts of Israel, Egypt, Turkey, and Iran—the greatest dominion known until that time. The exhibition features artistry created for several great Neo-Assyrian kings, from the first, Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) of Nimrud, to the last, Ashurbanipal (668–631 BC), of Nineveh. Art and Empire brings the grandeur of this ancient Near Eastern realm to life through the display of 30 monumental wall reliefs, as



Statue of Ashurnasirpal II, 883–859 B.C.

*The Trustees of the British Museum ME 124538

*Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

well as numerous cuneiform clay tablets, sculpture—both statues and stelae—and cylinder seals. Works on view range from *The king on campaign* (about 875–860 BC), a regal wall relief of Ashurnasirpal II going to battle, to *Dying Lion* (around 645 BC), the moving image of the noble beast in the throes of a painful death from an arrow lodged in his back, created during the reign of Ashurbanipal. (Among the finest wall relief carvings from this period are those of the lion hunts created for Ashurbanipal's North

Palace at Nineveh.) These are among the many objects that shed light on the administration of the empire, culture, trade, personal beliefs, and interrelationships between religion, magic, and medicine. Military dress, equipment, and horse trappings illustrating army life, as well as decorative ivory pieces, furniture fittings, and metal vessels showcasing the luxurious cosmopolitan lifestyle enjoyed by royalty, are among the highlights of the exhibition.

“The reliefs from Nineveh and Nimrud are a visual encyclopedia of ancient Mesopotamia, one of the cradles of civilization,” said exhibition curator Lawrence Berman (the MFA’s Norma Jean Calderwood Senior Curator of Ancient Egyptian, Nubian, and Near Eastern Art). “Today we are particularly aware how vulnerable these archaeological sites are in Iraq, and we can appreciate better than ever the efforts of archaeologists and museums past and present to preserve this part of the world’s heritage.”

In the mid 19th century, the full scope of ancient Assyria’s grandeur and supremacy was revealed through the efforts of French and British explorers. Preeminent among them was Austen Henry Layard, a British archeologist, whose interest was piqued by a large mound near Mosul, which he thought was ancient Nineveh. It proved to be Nimrud, the site of the ancient Assyrian city of Kalhu (known as Calhu in the Bible), and his discoveries there and at Nineveh in the 1840s and ’50s form the core of Art and Empire. Later excavations in the region by such notables as Hormuzd Rassam, George Smith, and Sir Max Mallowan, including finds made at Ashur and Khorsabad, complete the picture of Assyrians as mighty warriors and cultured sophisticates whose deeds were recorded in stone. The richness of Assyrian culture is the focus of Art and Empire, which is organized to highlight such subjects as the king and his world of opulence; the palaces and temples of the kingdom; the importance of warfare; royal lion and bull hunts; the significance of magic and religion; the royal fascination with literature and science, and administration and society.

The interiors of Ashurnasirpal II’s palace at Nimrud, as well as Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh, were magnificently adorned using wall reliefs as paneling along the bottom half of painted, mud-brick walls. Figuring prominently in the exhibition, these gypsum slabs are artfully carved with iron and copper tools. They average in size from about three-feet square, such as Three Protective Spirits (about 645–640 BC), to the immense and pano-

ramic, such as The Battle of Til-Tuba (about 650 BC)—consisting of three panels, each roughly 6 feet square. (All are technically fragments, having been cut down from larger compositions and even entire walls.) They shed light not only on techniques of warfare, but also on daily activities, religion, and the luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by Assyrian kings. Brightly colored (faint traces of the original paint are sometimes evident) so that they could be seen in the palace’s dimly lit staterooms and living quarters, the wall reliefs feature the kings as fierce warriors, hunters, and worshipers of Assyrian gods. Cuneiform inscriptions herald their conquests and achievements. Fantastic mythical creatures as well as protective winged genii ward away evil spirits. Such expansive wall reliefs were part of an elaborate decorative plan that glorified the king; they also served as propaganda—proclaiming his awesome majesty while warning of the gruesome death and destruction that would befall his enemies.

In addition to mandating a new look for Assyrian palaces, Ashurnasirpal II was responsible for the creation of Assyrian sculpture as we now know it. Carved in magnesite, an extremely hard stone, the Statue of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC), stands approximately 6 feet tall with its original pedestal, and is the largest and best preserved Assyrian royal sculpture in the round. The ruler appears without a crown, but with long hair and an ornately curled beard. He wears a tunic and fringed shawl, and carries a ceremonial sickle to fight monsters, as well as a mace symbolizing his god-given authority. Inscribed on his chest is a list of his titles and ancestors. The statue was found in the Temple of Ishtar, where it was placed as a devotional piece.

Sculpture, in the form of monumental bas-reliefs, chronicled a king’s achievements, particularly on the battlefield, where wars were conducted in the name of the



Escape across a river
Assyrian, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 875–860 B.C. Gypsum
*The Trustees of the British Museum ME 124538 *Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

state god, Ashur, from whom the name “Assyria” is derived. *Escape across a river* (about 875–860 BC) dramatizes an incident during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II

when, in 878 BC, the king and his soldiers encountered enemies near the Euphrates river. Assyrian archers along the river bank are seen in the relief shooting at the men, who are swimming away to safety with the aid of inflated animal skins. Another work, *The Battle of Til-Tuba*, dates to the reign of Ashurbanipal. Its depiction of bloody warfare reinforces the Assyrians' reputation for ruthlessness. The *Battle of Til-Tuba*, a monumental work considered the finest large-scale composition in Assyrian art, shows the Assyrians defeating the Elamites of southern Iran. Scenes highlight the Elamite king's chariot crashing down, the king's flight from the wreckage, and his capture and beheading, with the severed head being carried back as a trophy to Assyria. The story unfolds amid a backdrop of horrible carnage and the confusion of battle.

Overseeing human interactions are the protective spirits and demons associated with Assyrian magic and religion, who guarded the palace against harmful influences. Set of *protective spirits* (about 645–640 BC), from Ashurhani-



The king on campaign
Assyrian, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 875–860 B.C. Gypsum
*The Trustees of the British Museum ME 124557.
*Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

pal's North Palace in Nineveh, features three magical figures who protected the king as a set: a *lahmu*, or Mesopotamian diety; an *ugallu* or "Great Lion;" and what appears to be a House God. Their features conform to precise rules of design and they are shown as though viewed from the front, while their heads are in profile—a standard Assyrian convention for representations of the human body. Clay tablets and amulets inscribed with incantations also were



Royal lion hunt, Assyrian, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 875–860 B.C. Gypsum
*The Trustees of the British Museum ME 124579
*Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

used to deter demonic spirits. Included in *Art and Empire* are several of these tablets, which also feature magical spells. Amulets, inscribed with incantations, were worn as protective devices. Stone head of *Pazuzu* and Bronze head of *Pazuzu*, both from the 8th–7th century, show the mythical evil creature, known as the "scary demon," whose image could be used for good, especially in the instance of protecting expectant mothers and newborns.

Large wall reliefs also were used to document the kings' preoccupation with hunting. Lion hunts provided an outlet for non-wartime combat, as Assyrians saw lions as savage enemies representing untamed nature. *Royal lion hunt* (about 875–860 BC) shows the king with bow drawn, ready to shoot once more at a fallen lion about to be trampled upon by the king's horses. At one point in Assyrian history, it was decreed that only royalty could kill lions.

Such rules and regulations, as well as public documents (tax rolls, agricultural records, treaties), religious rituals, and literary texts were written in cuneiform script and preserved on clay tablets, many of which were discovered by Layard's protégé, Hormuzd Rassam, from the extensive library at Ashurbanipal's palace in Nineveh. The king asserted that he could read the wedge-shaped cuneiform script, and his desire to preserve in one place all of the world's important works of literature and science has been called visionary. Some of the works collected by Ashurbanipal were 1,000 years old at the time. Included in the king's library were fragments from a copy of the Epic of Creation (7th century BC) as well as from The Epic of Gilgamesh (7th century BC), considered the most important work of Mesopotamian literature. In the 19th and 20th century, more than 20,000 cuneiform tablets were discovered by the British Museum.

While stone wall reliefs served as the primary aesthetic enhancement in Assyrian palaces and temples of the 9th – 7th century, other objects in *Art and Empire* highlight the refinement of their decorative arts. Intricately carved ivory pieces often were used to embellish royal furnishings,

sometimes accented with semi-precious stones and gold leaf, such as in *The Lioness and the African* (9th–8th century BC). The panel, which depicts a lion mauling a man in front of a beautifully carved floral background, is most



The Lioness and the African, (9th–8th century BC)

*The Trustees of the British Museum ME 124579

*Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

likely Phoenician, acquired through trade or as war booty (The only other plaque of this kind, one of the treasures of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, has been missing since 2003.) Another ivory panel is *Woman at the window* (9th – 8th century BC), which captures the contemplative expression of a woman in Egyptian headdress staring out the window. Intricate carvings also can be found on cylinder seals used by the royal household; when rolled out over clay, the impressions they made served as official seals. Often crafted from semi-precious stone, the cylinders featured scenes of kings, warriors, gods, as well as animals in combat. Such cylinders were used to form a parure, or jewelry set, commissioned by Layard as a wedding gift for his wife, Enid. After wearing her grand necklace of Assyrian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Achaemenid cylinders and seals, Lady Layard later wrote in her diary that it was “much admired” by Queen Victoria when the Layards dined with her in 1873.

Other decorative items found during excavations by Layard include intricately incised bronze bowls and plates. In 1849, he discovered at the Nimrud site the so-called “Room of the Bronzes” containing hundreds of objects, about 150 of which were sent to the British Museum. Called the Nimrud Bowls, they were most likely acquired as war booty or royal tribute. Bronze also was used to decorate wooden doors erected by Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC) at his palace at Balawat. Sixteen embossed and



Woman at the window, Syrian, 899–700 B.C. Ivory

*The Trustees of the British Museum ME 118159

*Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

chased bands from the Balawat Gates, approximately 10 inches tall by 70 inches wide, were discovered, documenting in exacting detail various incidents from the king’s campaign in 859 BC. Two bands are included in the exhibition as are such objects as portraits of Lord Austen and Lady Enid Layard, a copy of Layard’s 1854 book, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, and photographs and descriptions of Assyrian excavations.



Lady Layard’s jewelry, Gold, cornelian, chalcedony

*The Trustees of the British Museum ME 115656, 105111-105128 (1913-2-8,1-18).

*Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Tracing the origins of the Olympic Games

By David Chibo

www.gilgameshgames.org



Ever since the Western archaeological discovery of the ancient Olympic Games - which were used as the antecedent of the modern Olympic Games - historians and archaeologists have made numerous attempts to trace back the ancient Olympic Games to

their historical source in an attempt to better understand their meaning and importance.

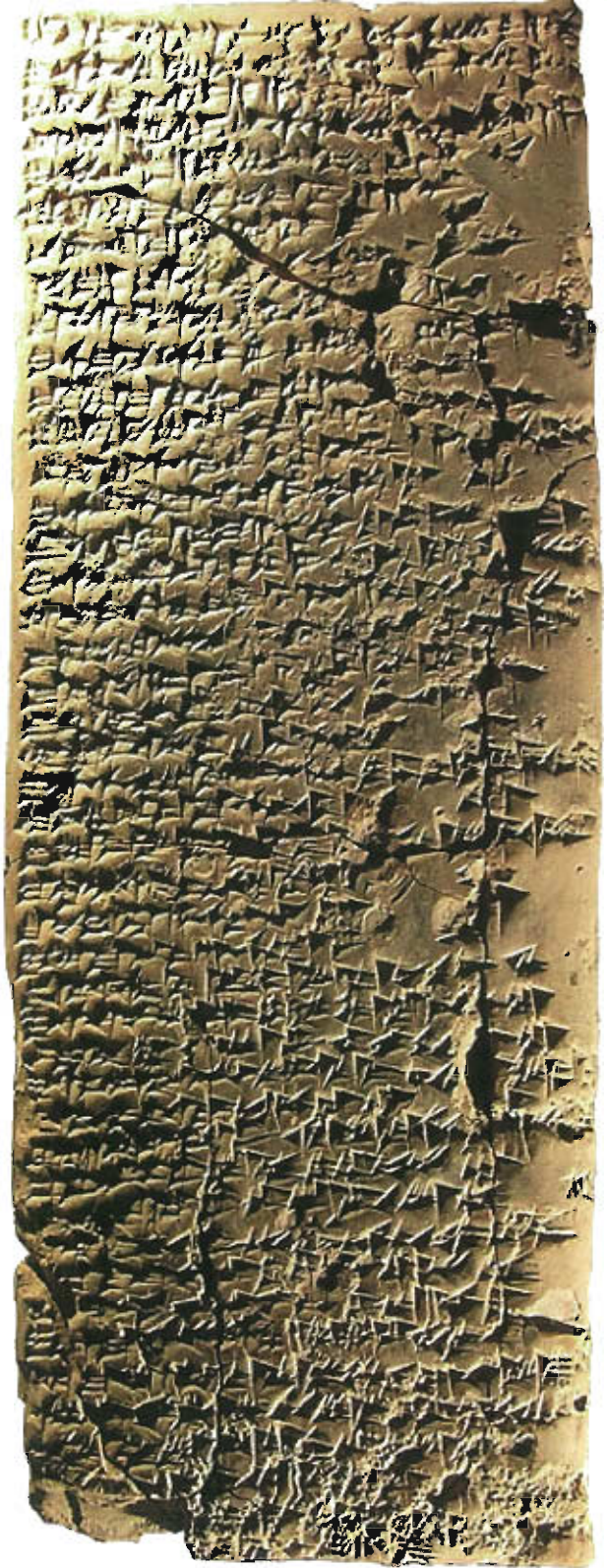
Finally on August 1st, 2008, on the eve of the modern Beijing Olympic Games, and on the same date used by the ancient Mesopotamians to commemorate the ancient Gilgamesh Games, the Gilgamesh Games thesis has finally been published online. After years of researching archaeological source data we are able to present to you what may very well be the origins of the ancient Olympic Games.

The main thesis shall show that the Mesopotamian (modern day Iraqi) cultural influence that had for centuries percolated into ancient Greece through contact with the Hittites (modern day Turks) and other peoples appears to have suddenly swamped Greece during the middle of the 8th century BC. This was during the start of the Sargonid dynasty which saw the Assyrian (ancient Iraqi) empire reach its geographical zenith and incorporate colonies such as the Greek island of Cyprus.

It was during this period that the funerary rituals and the athletic 'feats of strength,' depicted in the *Death of Bilgames* cuneiform tablet, along with other Mesopotamian athletics festivals may have been adopted from the ancient Mesopotamians and gradually incorporated into the ancient Greek Olympic Games.

Based on original Mesopotamian and Greek source material there are a total of eleven major similarities discovered thus far that may show that the ancient Greek Olympic Games have their antecedent in the ancient Gilgamesh Games.

The revelation that the Olympian "jewel in the crown" of Western civilisation may trace back to the Middle East may unsettle many readers, who have been immersed within the framework of Orientalism. It will also sound the final death knell for the artificial concept of "Western civilisation."



Picture: MS 3025 Gilgamesh Epic: The dream of Gilgamesh, Babylonian, 19th - 18th c. The Old Babylonian original version

Gilgamesh Games - Summary Table

Similarities	Gilgamesh Games	Mesopotamian Theme	Date of Transmission	Olympic Games	Greek Theme
Origin	Death of Gilgamesh	Funerary games conducted to remember the King Gilgamesh	776 BC (Myth) 704 BC (Archaeological)	Established by Zeus (Myth 1) Death of Peliops (Myth 2)	Myth 1; Zeus, Myth 2: Peliops. Fact : May have begun as funerary games, but no archaeological evidence at site of a grave or body.
Time of Festival	Month of Abu (August) every year	Ritual in which the ancient Sumerians remembered their dead ancestors. Yearly month of the dead, festival of ghosts passing through the temple Ab [doorway].	776 BC (Myth)	Began yearly every August then was changed to every 4 years.	The Olympiad may have changed to every 4 years due to the introduction of the chariot race.
Venue	Temple	Sanctuary for statue of the god.	NA	Zeus Temple	Sanctuary dedicated to the god and treasury for temple offerings.
Guardian	Statue of Gilgamesh in temple	Funerary statue also acted as earthly vessel. Focal point of the mourning rites and athletic games.	776 BC (Myth)	Statue of Zeus in temple	Focal point of temple at Olympia .
Title of Guardian	Judge of the Netherworld	Consolation for missing out on immortality as well as athletic games judge.	476 BC	Judge of Olympic Games	Zeus appointed judge of the Greek gods.
Introductory Ceremony	Mouth washing Hand washing Exorcism sacrifice (?) Washing with Waters of Life Lighting of Torches	Purifying the statue. Ritual séance for the dead that may have included an Exorcism ceremony that purified the statue of all malevolent deities returning from the Netherworld.	776 BC (Myth)	Sacrifice of pig in front of statue of Zeus. Lighting of Torch.	Sacrifice to Zeus, the Olympic Games' chief deity.
Athletic Events	Athletic 'Feats of strength'	Attainment of heroic glory and immortality.	~ 776 BC	Athletic Events	Attainment of heroic glory. Training for war during peace time.
Victory Awards	Poplar wreath crown	Used during purification rituals. Also symbolic of Gilgamesh who was described as the poplar tree.	752 BC	Different laurels used in different Greek games. Olive wreath crown used in Olympia .	Sacred wreath crown of olive sprays for winners was the same worn by Zeus.
Sacred Garden	Garden of Gilgamesh	Offerings made to deities (?).		Altis	The sacred grove of Zeus.
Funerary Gifts	Funerary Gifts to accompany the dead to the grave	Gifts to bribe the deities of the netherworld	750-650 BC	Funerary gifts	Votive offerings.
Closing Ceremony	Banquet with Gilgamesh & the Anunnaki	Food offerings to the gods of the netherworld and King Gilgamesh	776 BC (Myth)	Banquet of Zeus	Athletic victory banquet.



Terracotta Tablet showing Boxers and Musicians. Sinkara (Larsa), Old Babylonian, 1200 BC.

The discovery of the true origin of the Olympic Games came upon reading the following cuneiform text:

*The Dream God, Sissig, son of Utu,
shall provide light for him in the Netherworld, the place of
darkness.*

*Men, as many as are given names,
when their statues are fashioned for future days,
the warriors, the young men and the onlookers shall make
a semi-circle around a doorway
(lit. form a doorway like a crescent),
and in front of it (or them) wrestling matches and trials of
strength will be conducted.*

*In the month of Torches [August], the festival of Ghosts,
without him [Gilgamesh] being present light shall not be
provided before them.¹*

Three of the parallels in the *Death of Bilgames* poem above linking the ancient Olympic Games to the ancient Mesopotamian games commemorating Gilgamesh (henceforth ‘the Gilgamesh Games’) are immediately evident. Both the Olympic Games and the Gilgamesh Games festival took place in the month of *August*, consisted of ‘feats of strength,’ including wrestling, and included a torch-lit ceremony. A more detailed historical analysis comparing similarities between the Gilgamesh Games and the Olympic Games can be found in the main thesis published at www.gilgameshgames.org website.



¹ Antoine Cavigneaux and Farouk N. H. Al-Rawi, *Gilgameš et la Mort* (Textes de Tell Haddad VI, Groningen: Styx Publications, 1997), pp. 16 and 61, N1//N2 v 6-11.

Assyrian Heritage DNA Project

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Introduction:

Every national or heritage group represents a mixture of many different peoples going back over tens of thousands of years. The DNA Project will help Assyrians discover what are technically called their Haplogroups, which are the early branches of human ancestry, and learn about the migration paths of their ancient ancestors.

Why Should I join the Assyrian Heritage DNA Project? This is an opportunity for you, as an Assyrian, to order a DNA test kit and expand the Assyrian DNA database. By doing so, you will help to make sure that the genetic and historical past of Assyrians, which has been overlooked for too long, will begin to achieve its deserved recognition by the world. Participation in the Assyrian Heritage DNA Project by many Assyrians will raise our visibility as a significant Middle Eastern ethnic group that continues to thrive in the twenty-first century.

Goals of the project:

(1) To try to learn more about both the ancient people who preceded the beginning of the Assyrian Empire and about the ancient Assyrians.

(2) To try to help Assyrians learn about the migration paths of their ancestors during the diaspora after the fall of the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C.

(3) To encourage participants to add their DNA test results to the National Geographic Genographic Project after they receive their DNA test results. The Genographic Project is a landmark five-year study that will assemble the world's largest collection of DNA samples from people living in all parts of the world to map how humankind populated the planet. Since Assyrians descend from such a significant ancient civilization, a large sampling of Assyrian DNA needs to be represented in the Genographic Project's database.

(4) To help Assyrians who live in the USA and other western countries find relatives who are living in the West and/or in the Middle East. Men with matching or very similar 37 marker Y-DNA scores will have excellent evidence that they are related. They can then communicate with each other to try to determine who their common Assyrian ancestor was.

What DNA Tests Are Available and What Do They Cost?

FTDNA is offering at reduced prices a variety of tests to registered groups like our Assyrian Heritage DNA Project. The following is our recommendation of tests that would be most helpful to Assyrians who want to learn more about their ancestry.

A. Tests for a man to consider if he ONLY wants to test

his Assyrian father's line: (Choose only one)

(1) 25 Marker Y-DNA test which tests the paternal line ONLY--\$148 (US dollars)

(2) 37 Marker Y-DNA test which tests the paternal line ONLY--\$189 (US dollars)

(3) 12 Marker Y-DNA test for \$99 (US dollars) {note: The 12 marker test will fulfill the requirements for the Genographic Project, but you will learn more about your paternal Assyrian heritage by ordering the 37 or 25 Marker test.}

B. Combined Tests for a man to consider if he wants to test BOTH his Assyrian father's line and his Assyrian mother's line: (Choose only one)

(1) Y37-marker + mtDNAPlus which includes BOTH the 37 marker paternal and the high resolution maternal line DNA tests--\$339 (US dollars)

(2) 12 marker Y-DNA + the low resolution mtDNA test for \$199 (US dollars) {note: The 12 marker Y-DNA + the low resolution mtDNA test will fulfill the requirements for the Genographic Project, but you will learn more than twice as much information about your paternal and maternal Assyrian heritage by ordering the Y37-marker + mtDNAPlus test.}

C. Maternal Line Tests that a man or a woman can order to test his or her Assyrian mother's line ONLY: (Choose only one)

(1) mtDNAPlus Test which analyzes the high resolution maternal line DNA --\$189 (US dollars)

(2) Low resolution mtDNA - \$129 (US dollars) {note: The Low resolution mtDNA test will fulfill the requirements for the Genographic Project, but the mtDNAPlus test will provide twice as much information about your maternal ancestry.}

(Since women inherit ONLY their mother's mtDNA, this is the only test that a woman can order and it will test her maternal line DNA.

Women do not inherit Y-DNA, so they would need to recruit a male relative of their father's line to take a Y-DNA test to analyze the paternal line DNA.)

To reduce costs, one brother can test both his maternal and paternal lines and his sisters (and brothers) can share the cost.

The URL for the webpage which describes the Assyrian Heritage DNA Project in more detail and shows the DNA test results of the current participants is:

<http://www.familytreedna.com/public/AssyrianHeritageDNAProject/>

ABOUT ASSYRIA

The Assyrians, a Semitic people, formed one of the world's first great civilizations in the area known as Mesopotamia, now part of Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria, more than four thousand years ago. Centred on the fertile area between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, Mesopotamia is sometimes called the cradle of civilization. It certainly was the home of many advances in everything from writing to metal work to mathematics to governance to agriculture, especially irrigation.

Sargon of Akkad, who reigned from 2334 B.C. to 2279 B.C., is celebrated as one of recorded history's first great kings and helped build an empire. Sargon is also the name of one of Karam Guergis' sons. The First Golden Age for Assyria lasted until 612 B.C. After the decline of the empire, the area was ruled by many different powers, including the Macedonians under Alexander the Great, the Romans, the Persians, the Turks and the British. Karam Guergis left the area just as control was passing from the Turks to the British.

Ashurism was the first Assyrian religion. Christianity came to the Assyrians during the first century A.D. with the area being divided between two ancient Christian denominations: the Church of the East and the Syrian Orthodox Church. After the 16th Century, various Protestant religions arrived.

During World War One, the Assyrians sided with the British in the hope of winning independence from Turkey. This led to their persecution by the Turks and Persians, forcing many into refugee camps, including the wife, son and daughter Karam had left behind. At the end of the war, despite siding with the winners, they didn't get their own country.

Today, there are an estimated three million Assyrians worldwide, about half of them in Iraq. Most live in the north in what is now a semi-autonomous Kurdish state. The first Assyrians arrived in Canada at the start of the 20th century, settling in Saskatchewan. By the 1960s, there were still only a handful in Canada but the estimates now range from 7,000 to 20,000 Canadians of Assyrian descent with many arriving in recent years to escape the various conflicts in the Iraq region.

Prominent Assyrian Canadians include long-time sports broadcaster Johnny Esaw, a descendant of that first Saskatchewan group. South of the border, those claiming some Assyrian ancestry include Oscar-winning actor F. Murray Abraham and tennis player Andre Agassi. Although Helena Guergis is the first Assyrian Canadian in Parliament, there have been Assyrians elected in the United States, the Netherlands and Sweden. There have also been many Assyrians in Middle East politics, including former Iraqi deputy prime minister Tariq Aziz, now in jail awaiting trial.

(Continued from page 15)

gression. Both are ways of serving a community, getting involved and trying to make a difference.

David agrees public service is in the family's roots, going back to Karam and his many children. One of Karam's daughters-in-law, Norma, served as the church organist for 50 years. "I think they set the tone," says David. "I think our uncle George, our grandfather Karam, showed us the way and we've just followed."

Tony thinks they have also inherited something from their grandmother's side: a strong will and determination. "She came here out of a refugee camp without any English at all and was expected to be the minister's wife."

Tony is quick to point out it's not just the Guergis side of the family which was interested in politics. He has fond memories of his maternal grandfather, Captain Charles Harrington, who came to Canada as an orphan at age 16 to work on a farm and ended up making much of himself.

Tony remembers family dinners where talk turned to politics when the desserts came out.

"It became obvious this was the serious part of the conversation," says Tony. "What I got out of it was how important politics were."

And his mother Pat, while not politically active, has always been community minded, through her career as a newspaper reporter and staff member at Georgian College, where she was involved in continuing education. "So many people have come up to me and said they met the Guergis family through my mother," says Tony.

George was the first Guergis to enter politics in the 1970 municipal election at the urging of the local business community which was tired of seeing Essa Township dominated by rural representatives. It was quite a leap for someone born overseas and raised in a refugee camp. George won by one vote in a recount, becoming reeve. A son, Edward Guergis, Tony and David's cousin, followed in his footsteps, becoming a township councillor and eventually deputy reeve.

All the family members agree politics was a big part of their life as they grew up. "We have a family that really does get involved and take it to heart," says David. "We're news watchers, we're somewhat opinionated.... Some of us get involved and some of us don't."

A political career was not pre-ordained for any particular Guergis. In the large family, most chose not to run for office. Tony, who has a construction business which he has wound down while he is serving as warden, drifted into politics seven years ago when people in his area encouraged him to represent them on particular issues.

"I was certainly encouraged because I like to bring the perspective of people forward," says Tony. Once elected, he was bitten by the political bug. "I love politics. I love the meetings. I love the people."

Even though David and Tony's father wasn't in politics, he worked for Essa Township and always had a healthy interest in civic affairs, taking his sons to all-candidates meetings. He even helped found the Angus Chamber of Commerce. That's where David, who made his living selling cars and in real estate, began his career of public service, eventually becoming chamber president.

"That was really my springboard to politics," says David. He sees politics as a natural follow-up to a business career. "Being a large, prominent family in our community I think we knew a lot of people," he says. "A lot of us are business people and you meet a lot of people when you're in business. You have those coffee-time discussions."

In 1994, he threw his hat in the ring as the Angus council representative, the first year Essa went to a ward system. That was also



Here are the political records of the five members of the Guergis family to have served Simcoe County politically.

George Guergis

Essa Township reeve and Simcoe County councillor: 1971-1974

Edward Guergis

Essa Township councillor: 1978-1982
Essa Township deputy reeve and Simcoe County councillor: 1983-1985

David Guergis

Essa Township councillor: 1994-1997
Essa Township deputy mayor and Simcoe County councillor: 1997-2001
Essa Township mayor and Simcoe County councillor: 2001-present

Tony Guergis

Springwater Township councillor: 2000-2003
Springwater Township deputy mayor and Simcoe County councillor: 2003-2005
Springwater Township acting mayor: 2005-2006
Springwater Township mayor and Simcoe County councillor: 2006-present
Simcoe County Warden: 2007

Helena Guergis

Simcoe-Grey member of parliament: 2004 - present
Federal cabinet member: 2007

Christine Brayford

New Tecumseth councillor: 2006-present

the year when David's cousin, Helena, made her first foray into the political world, albeit behind the scenes. As with her cousins, Helena grew up in a political environment.

"Since the year I was born, 1969, there has been a member of my family elected so that would definitely have an impact and some influence on my decision," she says. "As a topic of conversation, politics was always around the table but whether I would be involved?"

Helena says the female members of the family joined in the political talk but were "not always encouraged" to become active. "That wouldn't be the path we'd be taking because we were women," she says. "It was something I decided to do on my own."

She admits being told she can't have something tends to make her work harder to get it. "There was a conversation with my father. He had told me that my role in life would be different and that my older cousin David would run for council.I was a little taken aback by that but fortunately I left and decided to form my own path."

After closing her Angus bath store, that path involved working for a Barrie MPP and a Queen's Park cabinet minister, getting involved with riding associations and serving three terms on the provincial executive. She even ran in 2003 as a bit of a sacrificial lamb in a To-

(Continued on page 35)

Ancient Church Awaits Restoration In Iraq Desert

AIN TAMUR, Iraq (AFP) - Armed bandits and looters rule in the region and no one can visit the southern desert



A general view shows the ruins of a church at the Iraqi Al-Aqiser archaeological site

© AFP/File Mohammed Sawaf

around Ain Tamur unescorted, local officials say. But 1,500 years ago, the first eastern Christians knelt and prayed in this barren land, their faces turned towards Jerusalem.

The remains of Al-Aqiser church lie in the windswept sand dunes of Ain Tamur, around 70 kilometres (40 miles) southwest of the Shiite shrine city of Karbala, forgotten by most.

But some Iraqis are determined to restore the ancient edifice -- which some say preceded Islam in the region -- to its past glory.



The ruins of a church at the Iraqi Al-Aqiser archaeological site

© AFP/File Mohammed Sawaf

"It is a place of worship, a church, and without doubt, the oldest church of the East," said Hussein Yasser, the head of the antiquities department of the province of Karbala.

"According to our research, it was built 120 years before the emergence of Islam in the region," Yasser said as he took an AFP correspondent on a tour of the site.

Islam emerged in the Arabian peninsula in 622, or, by Yasser's account, 15 years after Al-Aqiser was built in a region teeming with Christian tribes.

In time, Karbala overshadowed it and became a key Muslim Shiite pilgrimage destination, while across the region Christian communities began to recede.

Deserted by its worshippers, Al-Aqiser slowly sank into the sands and would have been totally forgotten had it not been for a team of Iraqi archeologists who stumbled on its ruins in the 1970s.

The foundations of the church jut out of the desert, forming a perfect rectangle 75 metres (yards) long by 15 metres wide.

The nave is clearly visible as well as the central part around the altar where masses were celebrated.

"The church was built facing Jerusalem," said Yasser, who has been struggling since 1993 to attract funds and interest to restore the church and carry out excavations in the area.

His efforts were briefly rewarded some years ago when the authorities agreed to finance a brief excavation that lasted six months.

The work revealed an archway which he believes probably belonged to an underground crypt, bearing inscriptions



The ruins of a church at the Iraqi Al-Aqiser archaeological site

© AFP/File Mohammed Sawaf



A general view shows the ruins of a church at the Iraqi Al-Aqiser archaeological site
© AFP/File Mohammed Sawaf

in Syriac -- the language spoken by the first Christians.

"I am sure there is a city underneath the sand," said Yasser, a Shiite Muslim.

"Even then the city was known as Ain Tamur and stood at a major trading junction between Persia, the Arabian peninsula and the Roman empire," he added.

"There used to be a vast lake. People made their livelihood from fishing," he said, adding that the site was more archeologically, than religiously, significant.

A sand embankment indicates the location of the outer walls that protected the church, and Yasser is convinced that the uneven terrain that surrounds the church hides a wealth of archeological evidence.

"There are certainly houses beneath it all, and inside I am sure we can find cooking utensils, inscriptions," he said.

In the past Catholic Chaldeans, the largest single Christian denomination in Iraq who follow an eastern rite but recognise the Pope in Rome, used to pray in Al-Aqiser on Christmas Day but the faithful have not returned in a long time.

According to official figures, the Christian community in Iraq has slumped from around 800,000 in the 1990s to between 400,000 and 600,000 now.

The church "is part of our country's memory, part of the great civilisation that the Iraqis have built and it must be saved," said Yasser.

Ain Tamur police chief Mahfoud al-Tamimi said he agreed that Al-Aqiser must be saved.

"The church does not belong to the Christians only or to the Muslims. It belongs to the world," Tamimi said.

"The world must help us save it," he said, calling for the church to be added to UNESCO's world heritage site list.

(Continued from page 33)

Growing up Guergis

ronto riding where the

Conservatives had little chance to win. Then, of course, she returned to Simcoe County and won the federal nomination for Simcoe-Grey, leading to her upset win over the Liberal incumbent in June, 2004. Her father was eventually won over.

"My father right now is one of my biggest supporters. While I was a little disappointed with him, it was great because it made me go out and find more experience on my own."

It also prepared her for what she was to run into again and again: women treated differently because of their sex. "Yes, absolutely! There is a double standard," says Helena. This double standard, she is quick to point out, is not in the House of Commons but in the media and public. The Internet has been the source of many derogatory comments, speculation about her personal relationships and opinions on her looks, even before her promotion to the federal cabinet.

On a more positive note, her rising political star has also made her more aware of her roots, especially how much people like her great-grandfather Karam had to sacrifice and how hard he had to work to give his family a better life in Canada.

"Federal politics has really helped me to make that connection," says Helena, noting the freedoms Canadians enjoy. "I'm very proud of my family and the commitment they give to their community and what they've done for their country."

Being an MP has also made Helena even more aware of her heritage. Her web site proudly notes she is the first member of Parliament with an Assyrian background.

"I think it's something that I've been aware of but not until entering federal politics did I really become even more aware of it, the impact it's had on me."

Her cousin, Tony, recalls recently making an appearance with Helena at an Assyrian function in Toronto. The family was treated like celebrities and many guests were familiar with the Karam Guergis story. Tony says it was a real eye-opener. It made him aware that the Assyrian community in general held Karam Guergis in the same high regard as his family. "They were just so proud of the history, that one of them made it."

David likes to recall how his grandfather came out of the desert and crossed the ocean to make a better life for his family. "I can just picture that. In this day and age, we don't really grasp what our forefathers did to get us to his stage," says David. "What I'm doing just pales in comparison to the sacrifices they made."

Are there more family members to come in politics? David has a 15-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son who, watching their father head out to endless meetings, proclaim no interest in a political career. "They say no but when the news comes on they're sitting there with me watching," he notes.

Survival in Diaspora

Madeleine Davis (Ph.D.)
United Kingdom

Faced with the war and the killings and the deplorable economic situation in Iraq, most of the Assyrians have fled to the neighbouring countries hoping to be able to immigrate to the Western countries. This movement has two significant and perhaps catastrophic results for our nation.

The first is that our people settled in Diaspora since a number of years, already paralyzed with modern mode of life and entering a state of oblivion, were from time to time refreshed with the arrival of a few families from the Middle East as if revived from their unconsciousness with a surge of fresh blood. **With the mass migration and the disappearance of Assyrians in the homeland, there will no longer be supplies of fresh blood.**

The second is that the new migrants are expected to join the crowds of indifferent and inactive Assyrians and melt gradually, together with their predecessors, in the melting pots of the West.

Despite the plans to resettle the war-struck Assyrians in the Plain of Nineveh and despite "a convergence of interests and a momentum to create a homeland for the Assyrians, this does not mean that we are on the map", as emphasized by Dr. Rev. Keith Roderick, an Anglican Priest from the Christian Solidarity International and a Washington Representative in a lecture at the 74th Annual AANF Convention in San Diego. He added that it needs a lot of commitment and hard work to achieve this goal. The work has been started but the end is not yet in sight.

Meanwhile **we must think of ways to survive in Diaspora and maintain our identity even if the supply of fresh blood is interrupted.** We must not despair and lose hope because measures can be undertaken to enforce the solidarity between our people in Diaspora, some of which are listed below.

Creation of mixed day care centres

In an informal discussion, a friend suggested the establishment of combined day care centres for both the Assyrian elderly and children. As he pointed out, this has many advantages both for the old and the very young as the French have also been investigating and demonstrating the psychological benefits of such day care centres. Apart from the psychological benefits, **this scheme will assure the education of the very young in our language and culture through a constant and perpetual contact with the older generations.**

It was suggested by some of the people attending the meeting that since the Assyrian Church has already established schools and separate day care centres for the elderly (where they are fed three times a day and where they can

play and chat with fellow Assyrians) in Australia and USA with some success and since the establishment of a day care centre for very young children has just been undertaken in Australia, therefore the Assyrian Church seems to possess the infrastructure, the experience and sufficient support and goodwill of our people to undertake the new and additional project. It would be appropriate to send a formal request accompanied with donations to the leaders of the Assyrian Church.

Loans to students instead of gifts

It has been customary to donate a certain amount of money to the Assyrian students who are studying specific subjects such as Assyriology. Instead of just giving donations it would be more beneficial to all concerned if the money is given as a loan, which the students would undertake to pay back gradually once they start to work and receive an income. Legal contracts must be signed so that the repayment of loans can be enforced. Thus the students who have benefited from a loan can help future students to study and receive the best education.

Creation of jobs instead of donations to the needy

It is customary, in particular at present, to collect donations for the needy Assyrians and the Assyrian refugees. Trusting that the money reaches its destination, which may not always be the case, the poor people who receive the gifts, instead of investing them in a wise way, waste them by spending on luxuries they do not really need. Moreover, they learn to be lazy thinking that the Assyrians living in Diaspora are well to do and will always provide them with money.

Instead, all **donations should be invested in creating jobs** for the needy. People, who have experience in certain jobs, can help create small workshops where the needy are employed. Even old people can work in small workshops, for example they can pack goods, stamp envelopes, sort out certain food items. Not only money is not wasted, donations are put to good use and even profits may be made that can be used to expand and multiply the small businesses. Moreover the needy are busy and not idle, the sense of self esteem in them will be developed and a joyful all Assyrian atmosphere will be created in which our language will be practiced and maintained.

Assyrian classes in churches and associations

Many of the churches and associations who used to hold Assyrian language classes have given up because of the low turn up. This is wrong because even if one or two students show up, it is sufficient to motivate the teacher to

In Memoriam



Saayda Chamuon

Sturbridge....Saayda Chamuon of 72 Main St. Sturbridge died Sunday (April 6) peacefully at Harrington Memorial Hospital in Southbridge after being stricken ill at home. She was born in Syria, and has lived in Sturbridge for many years. She is

survived by her daughter Mansoura Aho owner of Delmon Alterations in Sturbridge with whom she lived, and also leaves a son Ninos Aho of California and his wife Oga-reet, and two other daughters Mariam Aho and Chmouni Aho of Syria who were here visiting with their mother from Syria. Another daughter Nora predeceased her in Syria. She also leaves four grandchildren in the United States, Romrama Khalbourji of California, Zalgai Aho of New York City and Delmon and Enleil Aho both of California, and 24 grandchildren overseas as well as 40 great-grandchildren. Saayda's husband Georges died in Syria many years ago. She was a devout and prayerful Christian and was a survivor of the 1915-1918 Assyrian genocide by the Ottoman Empire. She enjoyed spending time with her family and friends and was known and loved by many local people



Arpineh Sultanian

(Dec. 12, 1909 – May 18, 2008)

By Gohar Sultanian Hovsepian

On May 18th, 2008, Arpineh Sultanian bid farewell to life. She was a precious mother to her four children, five grand children and eight great-grand children.

Arpy (Arpineh) was the first child of Arshag and Nvart Der Stepanian. She was born in Nakhchevan, Iran, on December 12, 1909. She learned Armenian reading, writing and history under the guidance of her father. But, unfortunately, her happy childhood days were did not last long. Dangerous peril was apparent from outside the country.

It was 1918. Only eight years old, Arpy witnessed the turmoil of her birthplace, the city of Nakhchevan. Thousands of people from different areas were running, shouting, screaming, crying, "Turks are coming, Turks are coming".

Little Arpineh was left alone. With the help of an Armenian old lady, who invited her into her house, she found her five year old sister, Knar, and her three year old brother, Housig. Arpy left Housig under a tree. She held her younger sister's hand and tried desperately to run

away from the angry crowd, to escape the horror and shooting caused by the Turks. Thousands were mercilessly slaughtered. Those who survived were deported to Iraq, reaching Baquba and finally Baghdad.

In Baghdad, everyone was searching surviving family members. Arpy found her mother. Her father was wounded and later killed by the Turks. Her brother, Housig, was never found. In Baghdad, Arpy attended an Armenian school. She later married Harutyun Sultanian. Together they lived a wonderful and comfortable life. But, alas! The marriage did not last long. Arpy lost her spouse to illness and became a widow at a very young age. However, she was never desperate. She opened a tailor shop which became very successful. She was very famous, especially among upper-class Arab families, and finally became the dressmaker of the Royal family in Baghdad. Her work gave her children the opportunity to study abroad for higher education.

Arpineh Sultanian came to the United States in 1964 and settled in Pasadena, CA, where she attended the Pasadena City College. She was a member of ARS (Armenian Relief Society) "Sosse" chapter. In Baghdad, in addition to her career, she was very active, and in fact, was one of the founders of the society's Baghdad chapter. With pleasure and without any expectation she served the organization. She helped needy Armenians, Armenian students to continue their education and the Armenian Church which was the only cause for keeping and defending the Armenian identity in the Diaspora.

Note

By Samira Yacoub Hermes

Arpineh (Arpick) and Knar (Knarick) were adopted by Raabi Yacoub Bet Yacoub when he married their mother Mirvat (Nvart) Khachatorian at Baquba in 1920. All through their lives Raabi-



My sister, Arpick, my father, Rabi Yacoub and me (Samira Hermes) taken in Santa Ana

Yacoub had high regards and respect for the girls. As they married and had their own family, he and his family continued to have close contacts with them.

When my father, Raabi Yacoub, immigrated to the United States in 1972 and finally settled in Santa Ana, CA, with my brothers, Emmanuel and William, the contact with the Sultanians was revived and had close relations. They spent good and memorable times together. My sister Arpick (as I used to call her) will always have a special place in my heart. My daughters and son remember her as the sweet lady with silver hair and beautiful smile. God rest her soul.

10 Assyrian words

Nineveh Magazine is providing this ongoing column to its readers as a vocabulary supplement and to improve familiarity with both Assyrian dialects, Eastern (Swadya) and Western (Turoyo).

Hello

Western = Shlomo Eastern = Shlama

Use in a sentence

English: Hello to you

Western: Shlomo alaykhu

Eastern: Shlama alokhun

School

Western = Madrashto Eastern = Madrashta

Use in a sentence

English: School is fun

Western: I madrashto bassimto-yo

Eastern: Madrashta bassimte-la

Here

Western = Harke Eastern = Lakha

Use in a sentence

English: Stand here.

Western: Klay harke.

Eastern: Kli lakha.

Sport

Western = Durosho Eastern = Dorasha

Use in a sentence

English: Sports is good for you.

Western: Odurosho tawo-yo elokh.

Eastern: Dorasha spay-ile qatokh.

There

Western = Tamo Eastern = Tama

Use in a sentence

English: Go there.

Western: Zul tama

Eastern: Zookh Itamo

Time

Western = Zabno Eastern = Zowna

Use in a sentence

English: It is taking long time.

Western: Greshle zabno yarikho.

Eastern: Shkila raba zowna/dana.

Book

Western = Kthowo Eastern = Ktawa

Use in a sentence

English: This is my book.

Western: Hano okthowaydi-yo

Eastern: Aha ktaw-ile

Letters

Western = Othwothe Eastern = Atwate

Use in a sentence

English: How many are our letters?

Western: Kmo othwothe qit-lan?

Eastern: Kma atwate it-lan?

Knowledge

Western = Yulfono Eastern = Yulpana

Use in a sentence

English: Knowledge is important.

Western: Oyulfono mohimyo/anenqoyo-yo

Eastern: Yulpana anenqaye-le

News

Western = Tebe Eastern = Tebbe

Use in a sentence

English: Do you watch the news?

Western: Qhozat a tebe?

Eastern: Gashoqet el tebbe?

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Do Funeral Luncheons Benefit The Dead?

By Mikhael K. Pius

What is the advantage, or disadvantage, of *gourpala*, the Assyrian custom of offering a meal to hundreds of well-nourished people who attend a funeral in memory of a loved one, and will it benefit the deceased in any way in the other world?

This was the question—along with a few others—asked of pastors of four different Assyrian churches in the Turlock-Ceres-Hughson-Modesto (California) area, on a recorded Assyrian talk show program anchored by the late Mr. Oner Muradi and dubbed some years ago.

Rev. Eshai Joseph, then pastor of *Mart Maryam* Ancient Apostolic Church of the East in Hughson, said in words to the effect that this is a custom with a long history; that it was started in *Atra* (old country) a long time ago. He said that some people would come on foot or horseback to a funeral from other villages, and because there were no eating places then, such as restaurants, neighbors and some generous families of the village would prepare food and bring it to the home of the deceased. The bereaved family along with the people attending the funeral—and particularly guests from nearby villages—would partake of the food. What was left over would be distributed to the poor and the needy of the village. This was meant as a charitable act in memory and in honor of the dead person as well as a hospitable act of sympathy to the bereaved family. Rev. Eshai thought that at this time of plenty and convenience there is no need for such a custom.

And according to the late Rev. Shmouel Iskhaq then preacher of the Assyrian Evangelical Church in Turlock, “Only the dead persons’ good deeds during their lifetime would redeem them, and that lunch or anything else would not benefit their souls.” He further pointed out that many people propose to abolish the custom, but they still continue to imitate each other, fearing that they would be criticized if they don’t offer an elaborate luncheon in memory of their dead. “The event has become a sort of celebration party instead of a time of sadness and sympathy. But someone should have the courage to begin to stop the custom,” concluded Rev. Shmouel.

Rev. Ochana Kanon then pastor of *Mar Zaia* Assyrian Church of the East in Modesto thought that the *gourpala* custom is a difficult problem; that each person has his or her own idea about it, but that the deceased’s own good deeds in life would save him. Rev. Ochana agreed with Rev. Shmouel that it would take courage to take the first step to end the custom. “Furthermore,” he went on, “we priests have preached, time and again, that if a family cannot afford the expense of a luncheon they should not do it.”

Fr. Sabri Yousif then parish priest of *Mar Toma* Catholic Church of Turlock pointed out that St. James in the Holy Book asks whether a man can save himself by his works or by his faith. “He says ‘Show me your faith and I will show you your works.’” Fr. Sabri said that a man’s deeds emerge from his faith, and faith comes from good works, good manners, and that a *gourpala* cannot send the soul of a faithless deceased person to

the Kingdom of Heaven.

Fr. Sabri further added that the wealthy offer luncheons to attract many people to the funeral, to give themselves and their dead a sense of importance, and thereby they influence many poor people to do the same thing in order not to be embarrassed by appearing poor. “This is pride,” continued Fr. Sabri, “and pride is mankind’s first sin, and that is not in the spirit of the Gospels.”

Mr. Oner Muradi said that if people have respect for him and his dead they could still honor his dead and share in his grief without the enticement of a memorial luncheon. “There are some people who attend a memorial luncheon,” he went on, “when they don’t even know whether the deceased is male or female, let alone knowing the deceased or his or her family.” Mr. Muradi thought the wealthy people could have their pride, but the problem is that they influence the poor families to follow in their footsteps, causing them to incur heavy expenses and sometimes go into debt.

Mr. Muradi suggested that if a wealthy family wants to spend money in memory of their dead, they could donate the cost, or a smaller sum, to a good charitable cause, such as to the Assyrian Aid Society or to a church charity fund, or a national cause, where it will be put to better use.

A regular Assyrian public *gourpala* now consists of *rizza w’sherwa* (rice and meat stew), with bread, salad or fresh greens and coffee. A small to medium catered funeral luncheon (150 to 300 persons) usually takes place at the church hall and at \$8.00 a plate costs \$1,200 to \$2,400. A bigger affair (400 to 600 persons) is held at Civic Club or Bet-Nahrain Organization hall and at \$9.00 or \$10.00 a plate can cost up to a whopping four to six thousand dollars. (It is perhaps worth mentioning here that Assyrian American Association of Modesto gladly offers their huge hall, free of rental charge, to anyone wishing to hold a funeral luncheon or coffee memorial, with private catering by the bereaved family costing a fraction of what the churches or clubs charge.)

If, on the other hand, the luncheon is served at the bereaved family’s home to an exclusive group of close friends and relatives, a buffet or dinner meal is usually offered (consisting of several different dishes) which is more of a feast than a repast. But this mode of memorial lunch costs little to the bereaved family because usually some of the dishes are gifts from relatives or friends.

Additionally, there is also the third-day memorial church service and breakfast (sometimes offered at the deceased’s home to relatives and close friends only) and the 40th-day church service and *halva*-and-coffee memorial. In most cases one-year church service and coffee memorial is also held. Each of these also cost several hundred dollars, not to mention the cost of food and beverages served to the flow of condolers during the few-day wake and sympathy offering at the deceased’s home. In rare cases, some show off by offering a big luncheon at both the 40th Day and Annual memorials too.

(Continued from page 42)

Of course the burial expenses involved are unavoidable, though they could be kept to a minimum by selecting a modest grade of coffin, plot and marker. But *gourpala*, especially if held at church or club halls, is not really essential and can be eliminated. Of course the well-to-do can afford the expense, but for many Assyrian families it is a financially straining luxury, because when a dead person is very well known in the community, the family usually is obliged to hire a hall for a catered memorial luncheon despite their lean purse.

Rev. Shmouel also mentioned the extravagant custom of wasting a lot of money on flowers and other pretentious offerings. "In Teheran," he said, "some well-wishers brought so many flowers that a special car had to be hired just to take the flower offerings to the graveside!"

And he was not joking. We can see now that sometimes the whole altar frontage of the church is taken over by flowers, some, admittedly, church's artificial ornamental flowers, but mostly live flowers—but flowers that are already dead than the dead person! And can you imagine how much money is invested—and wasted—in these mountains of floral bouquets, sprays, crosses, wreaths and other pretentious tokens that adorn the church and casket for a couple of hours and the grave for a day or two before they wilt and are thrown away? I think this is a vainglorious waste that should be drastically minimized, if not eliminated. If relatives and friends want to honor the dead and the bereaved family, wouldn't be more charitable to offer the cost of the flowers, or smaller amounts, to the bereaved to donate to our needy people?

I had a personal experience myself when a younger married sister of mine passed away recently. My siblings and I were intent on making financial donations to a charitable organization in lieu of flowers. I'm a person of little means, but when a couple of women at the wake learned of our intention they shamed me into spending \$150 \$100 for a wreath at the last minute. And there were several other flower arrangements from my sister's family and in-laws and other close relatives, all bought from the same flower seller, costing several hundred dollars. (I learned later that my two flower critics and "advisers" were sisters of the flower seller!) And two floral offerings were delivered from Canada after the funeral was over—a sheer waste of money!

Wouldn't just one or two floral wreaths placed on the coffin, and later on the grave, by the two immediate families of the deceased be enough for adornment as well as to express their sentiment? But false pride knows no bounds!

During recent years an Assyrian gentleman shelled out 30 thousand dollars to have a marble monument erected over his young son's grave. His son wasn't even a distinguished person in any way. And a vainglorious friend hailed this act as noble and wanted to publicize it. Is this really a noble act? Or is it a selfish, vain and wasteful investment that would not benefit any one other than the marble constructor? Can you imagine how many hungry mouths that money might have fed—mouths of Assyrian destitute refugees, stranded in foreign lands? And this, I believe, is a noble act that really deserved publicity!

Gourpala is indeed an old custom handed to us by our forefathers, and perhaps even by our ancestors. And other races practice it too in one form or another. Going back several decades, however, when the majority of our Assyrian people dwelt in the Eastern countries, specifically in Iraq and Iran, *gourpala* was a common practice. But it was a simple, solemn affair, not upbeat, expensive and noisy like today's conventions-like funerals.

Besides, there were no hefty church, casket, burial, and funeral-home expenses then, as almost all of these services were voluntary. Today funerals have developed into a form of noisy celebration of social prestige that is both extensive and expensive, costing low income families an arm and a leg! And it is a lucrative business not only to cemetery owners, funeral homes and headstone makers, but also to clubs, churches, and to flower sellers.

Some say *gourpala* is "the share of the dead," a sort of Last Supper, or a final tribute to the dead, and families are willing to shoulder the financial burden even though some moan and groan under its weight. Isn't it more of a "tribute" to the survivors of the deceased than to the dead, because *they* want to maintain their "pride" and not appear "less than others"?

Others regard the custom as a necessary social communion that affords a big crowd of people not only the opportunity to honor the deceased and condole and comfort the bereaved family by their presence and the offering of sympathy, but also by coming together to meet and greet and socialize with other people.

I think the get-together in honor of the dead does indeed have a moral and social value, especially for those who are not social butterflies; it's an opportunity to meet and greet some of their relatives and friends and share a meal together. It also serves as a reunion, especially to disenchant family members. And I think the *gourpala sherwa w'rizza* are even tastier than those cooked at home and people enjoy the meal and the noisy socializing that goes with it. It serves a very good purpose. But the costly manner in which it is done is another Assyrian way of "keeping up with the Joneses." By all means, the lunch-serving should be practiced by those who can afford the cost, but it should not be considered an obligation and copied by, or imposed on, those who cannot afford the expense!

Can't the basic purposes still be fulfilled just the same and at a fraction of the price, especially by families of modest income, by doing a coffee-and-*halva* memorial, as it is the usual practice now in the case of the 40th-day and the first anniversary memorials, instead of offering an expensive funeral luncheon to hundreds of well-nourished sympathizers sometimes at the expense of the bereaved family's over-loaded credit cards? (Exception to the rule could be those attending the funeral from out of town and who need to be fed.) And if some bereaved families still wish to do an act of charity, they can instead feed a group of our people "existing" in "no-man's land," and who are really hungry, by sending them financial help. And that in my opinion would be a real noble act—and something for all of us to consider!



تیمکە بەرێک سووێتی دێشە

تێگەشتنێ بەرێک



بە 18 تەمبەز 2008، ئەمەریکایەکان بەرێک دێشێکی هێنەنە ئێراندا و ئەمەریکایەکان (A.F.A.) بە سووێتی ئەمەریکایەکان (Tahoe). 19 قەترەکان بە سووێتی قەتییەکان دێشێکی بەرێک ئەمەریکایەکان، ئەمەریکایەکان دێشێکی هێنەن.

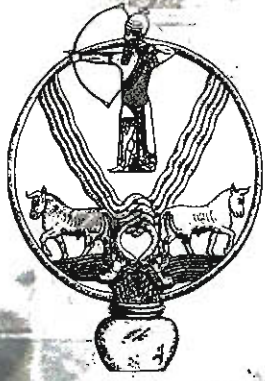
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