

NINEVEH

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See Page 18

Cultural - Educational - Social

NINEVEH

Volume 33, Number 1, 2010

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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.

Opinions expressed in *NINEVEH* are those of the respective authors and not necessarily those of *NINEVEH* or the Assyrian Foundation of America.

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From the President:

Since we moved to the United States in 1977, my parents have been members of the Assyrian Foundation of America. They used to take my brother, sister, and me to all the functions. I always remember the Foundation as one happy family, where everyone came together, shared joyful times and passion for their nation. As I grew older, I gained even more appreciation for the Foundation and its members. Their noble efforts throughout the years striving to help our people globally, instilled a sense of pride and ownership for me to get involved in my Assyrian community.

Some of my fondest memories of the Foundation are the parties in the old building in Berkeley, which still bring a smile to my face. I remember the New Year's Eve parties with people dancing to the tunes of the Assyrian Star band, formed by young talented musicians. My brother John was on the guitar, Dr. Robert Karoukian on the key board, and Paul Elias on the drums. Sometimes we had no "hired" singers, so some members would proudly stand up in front of the microphone and sing old Assyrian songs such as "Brata Shaberta", "Younee", and "Asmara", while people continued having fun and dancing Sheykhane, Toulama, Belatee, etc. As the saying goes "some things money just can't buy".

From the Editor:

Dear readers: This is my first issue as Editor of Nineveh Magazine and it is a great honor but I have big shoes to fill in after our previous Editor Dr. Robert Karoukian. He did a great job as the previous Editor of our magazine and it will be hard to keep up the same quality, but I'll do my best and try to improve the magazine as much as possible. Luckily he is still part of the Nineveh Magazine Editorial Staff and is responsible for the Assyrian section.

The magazine is put together completely on a voluntary basis (except for printing and mailing) and everyone is doing an amazing job. Thank you all: Dr. Robert Karoukian, Firas Jatou, Dr. Joel Elias, Tobia Gewargis and Sargon Shabbas. A special thanks to: Tamara O Benjamin, Paul Benjamin, Donatella Yelda and Nineb Lamassu for their continuous help and inputs to improve our magazine.

Also a BIG THANK YOU for all the magazine contributions. Your contributions make us feel needed and important in your lives. I ask you continue sending us interesting material about Assyrians, Assyrian communities, Assyrian

Today, I am the president of the Assyrian Foundation of America. I could not be more proud to take part in the leadership of an organization that I grew up in. It was established by a few good Assyrian men and women in the San Francisco area whose legacy was to assist needy Assyrians, promote education, and preserve our culture. Moreover, through its Nineveh magazine publication, the Foundation has transformed itself into a global voice, speaking to the world and showing the faces of hope and courage among our people. I look forward to contributing my drive and passion to help the Foundation with its continuing mission of helping our beautiful nation.

On a final note, I salute the founding fathers of the Assyrian Foundation of America, whose vision and commitment to help the Assyrian people has become a key differentiator and strength for our nation. I would also like to thank my predecessor Fredy Tamraz and his Board for their services and positive contributions during the past three years.

Jackline Yelda
Assyrian Foundation of America, President



achievements. As you all know it's not always possible to fit in all the material in one issue, but we do our best. The financial contributions towards our magazine make a difference, no matter the size of the donations, so keep them coming.

Our magazine today has 800 subscribers around the world. The majority of our subscribers are from the US. Nineveh Magazine is distributed to 23 countries and 40 Academic Institutions worldwide. We would like to keep this magazine alive and that can only be done with your help, as a reader both financially and material wise.

To our young Assyrian academics, I'm sure you all have great ideas about different themes that are interesting to you, so please share them with us (see address inside cover). As mentioned above the magazine is sent to 40 academic institutions worldwide so it's a good reference for your future.

We know that Nineveh Magazine is widely appreciated by our subscribers and therefore we work hard on keeping the publication alive. Tawdi sagi!



the first story of the Biblical Flood explained in the Epic of Gilgamesh. In this very same library texts were found about the Epic of Creation "Enuma Elish" (Akkadian "When in the Highest") recorded in cuneiform on seven tablets, referring to seven generations in the creation of the universe and human kind, similar to the text of the seven days of creation in the Old Testament's Book of Genesis.

The contents of this library are considered to be the main portal to Assyriology and the beginning of the discovery of all the writings that have been later distorted, encompassing human thought for 2000 years. The contents of this monumental library have scientifically replaced the Torah which was considered for many centuries the sole historic reference to the area.

In the middle of the 19th century scientist Henry Rawlinson was able to decipher and read the cuneiform script, then George Smith shocked the Torah school of thought around the world when he was able to read and interpret the Babylonian Epic of The Flood in 1872. The similarities between the religion of Assyria and that of the Torah's legends astonished even the Jewish scholars at the discovery of the Assyrian cuneiform written tablets. Thus the phrase "Mesopotamian Torah" was given, and those scientists had to face a fierce confrontation by the western Churches and Jews, which resulted in the disappearance of many important tablets.

Scientist Fredrich Dellitch mentions how he lectured on the topic of the Mesopotamian Torah in Berlin on 13 December 1902 in the presence of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The monarch asked him to repeat it in the Royal Palace, so he presented his lecture entitled "Babylon & the Bible", where he explained that the stories of the Bible were taken from Assyria, creating a huge clamor within the European media, which caused Dellitch to receive threats from some Jewish Rabbis and was severely reprimanded by western Churches.

Few of the neighboring peoples to the Assyrian homeland know about Neesan (April), its connotations, both cultural and national to the Assyrian people as well as its philosophical background for all of humanity. Generally, today's Assyrians consider the month of Neesan as God's blessed month, exactly as it was considered for thousands of years before, when the belief was that behind nature's revival was the Lord of the gods' descent to earth, then battling with the evil gods and defeating them and finally marrying the goddess Ishtar, thus reviving nature and the beginning of Spring.

The Sumerians called this feast "Akiti Zigorku", but in Assyrian it was called "Rish-Sateen" (The Beginning Of the New Year). Even today, the month of Neesan is scientifically considered the real beginning to the cycle of life

on earth, for in March/April, nature begins to renew and revive itself and not in January.

In the Assyrian cities (Babylon, Nineveh and the rest) the Epic of "Enuma Elish" was considered the ritual reading which embodied the Lord of the gods' eternal existence, the beginning and the purpose of life. This is considered one of the oldest Epic legends in history which was recited in the temple of Mardukh, "Esagila" (Magnificent House), that was done on the fourth day of Akitu (Assyrian New Year's festivities in Babylon lasting twelve days following the night of the equinox between 19-21 of March).

The prelude to the Epic of Enuma Elish mentions in the first tablet the beginning of the first generation when the earth didn't exist and was nameless. The universe was represented by the male element; Apso (god of fresh waters), the female element Tiamat (goddess of salty waters) and Mammu (god of clouds) which moved between them (note here the exact similarity in day one of Genesis 1:1-2).

Then in the sixth generation, the god Mardukh (Ashur for the Assyrians of Nineveh) creates "Lallu" (human) to serve the gods so that they may rest in the seventh generation (exactly as when God created a human on the sixth day, and rested on the seventh, Genesis 2:2-3). Briefly, the story of Creation is about the goddess Tiamat which takes the form of a dragon "Habur" which swims in the seas, wanted to get rid of her bothersome grand-children in order to enjoy a peaceful time with her husband Apso, so she summons the scary beasts for a battle. Then comes Mardukh (Ashur) and battles her until he's victorious, then divides the waters Tiamat into two parts, creating the heavens with its stars and planets, while he makes the earth with the second part where he creates animals and plants (as in the Torah, Genesis 1:6 when God separates between the waters and creates heaven and earth) When Mardukh finishes with all that, he creates a pair of humans with blood and mud, then Mardukh builds a house on earth so that he may rest whenever he descends to earth in April (exactly as the Lord of hosts builds a house in Israel (II Samuel 7:1-17) The phrase "Lord's tent" is found in the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh -where the Torah's story of the Flood was taken in the person of Noah after the Babylonian "Ziosodra" & the Sumerian "Utemapeshtim").

Neesan Festivities in Nineveh and Babylon Before the Time of Jesus Christ

(Some general ideas about the ancient Assyrian mythology)

The following brief picture about the festivities can give the reader an idea of how the ceremonies of the Assyrian New Year were conducted in Babylon and Nineveh. Here we learn about the concept of the Lord of gods, Mardukh in Babylon and Ashur in Nineveh. The festivities of the Babylonian Assyrian New Year (Akitu) were held starting

on the first night of spring equinox, and they included prayers, massive religious plays as the priests would use figure representations of the gods as a medium of expression. The program of the festivities would be as follows:

1st to 3rd Day: Purifying souls: The priest of Easagila (Marduk's house) would recite solemn prayers with the other priests and the people would answer with equally woeful prayers which expressed humanity's fear of the unknown. That is why the high priest would head every day to the Esagila asking for Marduk's forgiveness, begging him to protect Babylon, his holy city. This prayer was called "The Secret of Esagila".

4th Day: The same rituals would be followed as in the previous three days. Then at night the Epic of Creation "Enuma Elish" would be recited, telling the story of how the universe and the four seasons were created, how all gods united in god Marduk following his victory over Tiamat the dragon. The recitation of this Epic was considered the beginning of preparations for the submission of the king of Babylon before Marduk on the fifth day of Akitu.



Assyrians celebrating Assyrian New Year– Akitu – in Qamishly, Syria, 6760 (2010).

mission of the king of Babylon before Marduk. The king would enter to the Esagila accompanied by the priests. They would approach the altar where the high priest of the Esagila impersonates Marduk then he approaches the king, begins to strip him of his jewelry, scepter and even his crown then he would slap him hard while the latter would kneel and begin to pray asking for Marduk's forgiveness. The king would then ask: "I have not sinned O Lord of the

universe, and I haven't neglected your heavenly might at all"... Then the priest in the role of Marduk repeats: "Don't be afraid of what Marduk has to say, for he will hear your prayers, extends your power, and increase the greatness of your reign". After this the king would stand up and the priest would give him back his jewelry, scepter and crown then slap him hard again hoping for the king to shed tears. Shedding of a king's tear expressed greater submission to Marduk and respect for the monarch's power. Returning the crown to the king meant his power was renewed by Marduk, thus Neesan would be considered not only the revival of nature and life but also to the State as well. Thus, these ceremonies would make the greatest and most feared personalities of that time (kings of Babylon and Nineveh) submit to the greatest god, and live a moment of humiliation with all the population, sharing prayers to prove their faith before the Mighty God.

Following a brief presence in his earthly home in Babylon and renewing the king's power, god Marduk remained in the "netherworld mountain" -- a tower composed of seven floors, known in the Old Testament as the Tower of Babylon. In the Old Testament God dwells on a similar "mountain" (Psalms 74:2). During this day according to the tradition of Akitu, Marduk would enter his dwelling and is surprised by the evil gods who will fight him, and then he's taken prisoner and waits for arrival of his son god Nabu who would save him from "Nough" and restores his glory.

6th Day: The arrival of god Nabu in boats accompanied by his assistants of brave gods coming from Nippur, Uruk, Kish and Eridu (cities in the south of today's Iraq). The gods accompanying Nabu would be represented by statues which would be mounted on boats made especially for the occasion. Here the people in huge numbers would begin their walk behind their king towards the Esagila where Marduk is held prisoner, chanting the following: "Here's he who's coming from far to restore the glory of our imprisoned father".

7th Day: On the third day of his imprisonment Nabu frees Marduk. The evil gods had closed a huge gate behind him when he entered his dwelling. Marduk would be fighting till Nabu's arrival, when he would break in the huge gate and a battle would go on between the two groups, until Nabu comes out victorious and frees Marduk.

8th Day: When Marduk is set free, the statues of the gods are gathered in the Destinies Hall "Upshou Ukkina", to liberate his destiny. Then it's decided to join all the forces of the gods and bestow them upon Marduk. Here, the king implores all the gods to support and honor Marduk, and this tradition was an indication that Marduk received submission from all the gods and was unique in his position.

9th Day: The victory procession to the "House of Akitu"



Assyrians celebrating Assyrian New Year– Akitu – in Qamishly, Syria, 6760 (2010).

where Mardukh's victory in the beginning of Creation over the dragon Tiamat (goddess of the nether waters) is celebrated. The House of Akitu which the Assyrians of Nineveh called "Bet Ekribi" ("House of Prayers" in old Assyrian language), was about 200 meters outside the city's walls, where there were wonderful trees decorated and watered carefully out of respect to the god who's considered the one to grant nature its life. The victory procession was the population's way to express its joy at Mardukh's (Ashur) renewal of power and the destruction of evil forces which nearly subdued life in the beginning.

10th Day: Arriving at "Bet Akitu", god Mardukh begins to celebrate with both the upper and nether world gods (the statues of gods were arranged around a huge table such as in a feast) then Mardukh returns to the city at night celebrating his marriage to goddess Ishtar when heaven and earth are united. As the gods unite so is this union arranged on earth. Thus the king personifies this union by playing the role of marrying the highest priestess of the Esagila, where they would both sit at the throne before the public and recite special poems for the occasion. This love brings forth life in the form of the season of spring.

11th Day: The gods return accompanied by their Lord Mardukh(Ashur) to meet again in the Destinies Hall "Upshu Ukkina", where they met for the first time on the

eighth day. This time they would decide the fate of the people of Mardukh (Ashur). In ancient Assyrian philosophy 'creation' in general was considered as a covenant between heaven and earth as long as humans serve the gods until death. Therefore, the gods' happiness was not complete except if humans were happy as well. Human's happiness was consequently dependent on the condition that he served the gods. So Mardukh and the other gods renewed their covenant with Babylon upon his return to his upper house (Heaven).

12th Day: The last day of Akitu. The gods return to Mardukh's temple (the statues are returned to the temple) and daily life resumes in Babylon, Nineveh ... and the rest of the Assyrian cities.

It was a tradition for the kings of Nineveh to visit Babylon and share with their brethren celebrating Akitu. Thus we see king Sargon II in one of his inscriptions explaining about his visits to Babylon saying: "In Babylon I joyfully entered the house of the Lord of gods, the Esagila, and my face was lit up with happiness, I held my great Lord Mardukh's hand and we walked together to the "House of Akitu", also many gods came from different places to share in a huge procession, with goddess Ishtar and her servants who played the reed pipes and brought joy to Babylon".

The Assyrian mythology influenced also neighboring peoples, especially because the Assyrian culture expanded to the Arameans and Phoenicians (Arameans of the coast) and even the Greeks. The legend of Dimuzi and Ishtar passed to neighboring peoples, thus the Assyrian god Dumuzi became Adonis for the Phoenicians and Greeks,



while the Aramaeans called him Tammuz, and he became one of the Hebrews' gods (Ezekiel 8:14). Ishtar became Ashtarout for the Phoenicians and "Heavens Aphrodite" for the Greeks, and "Heavens Queen" for Hebrews (Jeremiah 7:18 - 44:17 and chapters 19-25). Then Arshki-gal, the goddess of death, became the Greek "Perciphonee"... Also Neesan wasn't only considered the first month of the year in Assyria only, but the idea spread to Hatti(Syria), Phoenicia and Judea(Esther 9:1) and the Zo-

roastrians celebrated it since the seventh century B.C. and called it "Nuw-Ruz" (The New Day).

Even though Babylon fell to the Persians in 539 B.C, the

Assyrians kept their beliefs even during Alexander's time and also during the rule of his successors(331-126 B.C). During this time **the** Babylonian historian Berossos(Bar Aasha) compiled Babylon's history from 3600 B.C to the rule of Alexander in his famous book "Babyloniaca" in three volumes, responding to a request from king Antiochus II who ruled Babylon(261-247 B.C.). Berossos taught as well in Athens where he composed the book of "Wisdom". He was respected by the Greeks who sculptured a statue of him in his honor and made its tongue of gold. It's worthy here mentioning that Berossos during his days was the priest of the Esagila (Mardukh's House). The book "Babyloniaca" became a source of learning to the Greeks, following the letters of Herodotus and Alexander. The Greeks obtained a lot of the Assyrian sciences in the fields of religion, astrology, time measurement, calculation and mathematics, the most important one being that of Euclid in mathematical geometry which is taught till today in schools and universities around the world because it's considered as one of the basics in the science of mathematics.

Neesan Festivities After the Advent of Christianity
(Some Assyrian festivals inherited since the Assyrian Empire)

The new testament mentions that the Apostle Peter visited Babylon and established a church there (I Peter 5:13).The Assyrians were the first to embrace Christianity for they found in Christ's person the "Saviour" that they celebrated for, and also the new faith had many similarities with the religion of their forefathers:

1- The Oneness of the unseen God.

2- The tradition in the Land of Ashur about Mardukh (Ashur) who descends to earth and battles evil. He is then imprisoned in the earthly mountain and liberated on the third day. Life resumes with a new covenant, and as we have seen Mardukh(Ashur) was imprisoned by the evil gods on the fifth and liberated on the seventh day (that is on the third day of his imprisonment).

3- In Babylon the king takes over the role of Mardukh's servant during "Akitu"; while in the Assyrian inscriptions, on the sixth day of Akitu, the king of Nineveh's role dif-

fers from that of his Babylonian brother. The latter assumes this role if the hero Ninurta(Storm God)who takes revenge for Ashur and saves him after three days, exactly as Christ the Lord conquers death on the third day during a strong "Storm". Death in ancient philosophy especially that of Assyria, was considered as a form of imprisonment.

4- The beginning of Spring following Christ's Resurrection, as Spring begins when Mardukh (Ashur) is freed from darkness.

5- Mardukh's return to his upper house (Heaven) after his liberation and meeting with the gods (11th Day) just as Christ ascended to heaven following His Resurrection, then later meeting His Apostles.

6- The existence for the Babylonians of the idea of a holy trinity which was composed of Ea (god of the seas and Mardukh's father), Anu (god of heavens) and Enlil (god of the atmosphere and earth).

7- Baptism in Christianity, where the idea of cleansing sins inherited from "Nusard-El" which was considered as a tradition of sprinkling water in the path of the god Dumuzi. This tradition had a great part during Akitu alongside the celebrations of Mardukh's(Ashur) freedom, the Assyrians would sprinkle each other with water to wash away their sins before welcoming the god Dumuzi after his liberation from Arshkigal the goddess of death. The Assyrians still celebrate this tradition today by sprinkling water on each other and in the streets. Also known as

"Nusardel" on this day special prayers are recited in the Assyrian churches. St. John the Baptist while washing the people in the River Jordan asks: "Repent Ye For the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

Many Assyrian and non-Assyrian clergy admit to these similarities but not in public, however, at the altar the Old Testament is considered the book that tells about the New Testament, and that is to preserve an old Church tradition which was followed

considering the Torah as a prophecy to the coming of Christ. This tradition began in the Church of the East in the first centuries A.D at the schools of Urhai (Edessa) and Nisibin (Nisibis) which were considered the oldest



Assyrian celebrating Assyrian New Year - Akitu - in Iraq, 6760 (2010).

"Universities" in the world. The western Churches consider the Torah as a prelude to the Christian religion. However, the Torah contributes to the distortion of history by presenting the Assyrians as an impious people, while on the other hand it glorified Jews presenting them as a pious, tormented people and this has played an important role besides the Holocaust during the Second World War and the establishment of the State of Israel in the 20th century.



Although the Assyrians gave up their Akitu celebrations in favor of their Christian faith, they still considered Neesan as the month of renewal and resurgence. It has become a more simple festivity as until recently in the Assyrian villages girls would gather flowers and herbs on the first day of Neesan and suspend them under the house's roof, as a joyful expression to the arrival of the month of plenty and the revival of life and nature. These bouquets of flowers were called "Deqna D'Nissan" (Neesan's Beard). Also the villagers would gather their children in pairs of brides and grooms; then those children would visit every house, where they would be offered different sorts of sweets and these visits would last till night fall then they would gather to share and eat a popular meal made especially for the occasion. This tradition had its roots in the tenth day of Akitu when the god Ashur would marry the goddess Ishtar before they ascend to heaven on the eleventh day. On this same day the king and the high priestess as mentioned before would enact the holy marriage, and this feast is known today as "Kalou D'Soulaqa" (Bride of the Ascension).

However, with the resurgence of political parties within the modern Assyrian national movement it was decided to celebrate the Assyrian New Year on the first day of April (the 10th or the 12th of Akitu according to the equinox). The celebrations took a special tradition of public processions, festivals, patriotic and traditional songs, where the celebrants gather in every country in great numbers and go out to the fields where nature renews itself. April First is considered a nationalistic celebration for we rarely see an Assyrian who doesn't celebrate it. This day along with Assyrian Martyr's Day (August 07th) [An-Nahar newspaper 09/08/2001] are considered to be a national duty for all Assyrians wherever they are. They provide an occasion to

affirm the modern Assyrian existence. The Assyrian New Year became a point of continuation for the Assyrian national identity over the centuries in spite of all the persecutions the Assyrians faced beginning with the Fall of Nineveh (612 B.C) and the Fall of Babylon (539 B.C) followed by religious persecutions when they embraced Christianity and the organized massacres of the 20th century in Turkey and Iran (1915-1918) and the political persecutions in Iraq (1920-1933). These persecutions continue even today with the policy of arabization & kurdification under the Iraqi regime and the government of the so-called "Province Of Kurdistan". Interestingly both regimes are founded on the ruins of Assyrian monuments.

The Assyrians of today still keep many of the ancient festivals which they inherited from their forefathers even if they are celebrated in simpler ways. Some of the celebrations (Nusardel, Nineveh Fast) became a part of the liturgical celebrations, distinguishing Assyrians once again from their neighbors, for these festivals are celebrated distinctively by the Assyrians and the Church played a great role in preserving some of the Assyrian traditions over the centuries.

The joy of these celebrations has diminished in the Assyrian villages due to the instability and oppressive practices towards the Assyrians who face a war of eradication of their identity in their own homeland. This has also increased their rate of emigration. The greater level of association with people of different cultures than Assyrian and in the Diaspora where they live in areas far from each other has obviously contributed to the dispersion of the Assyrian identity, particularly within the Arab and Kurdish majorities in Assyria.

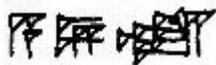
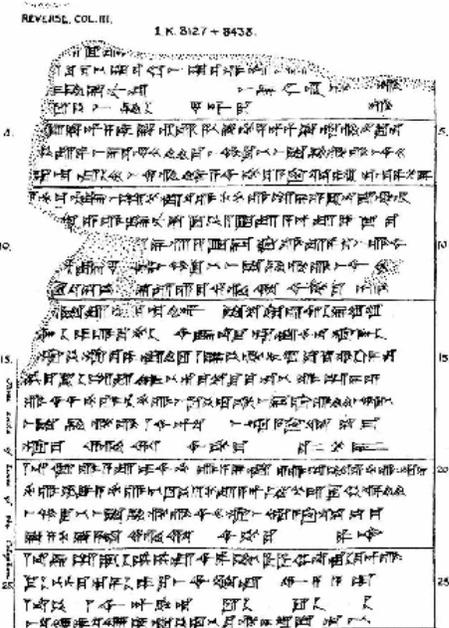
syria. For example, Ashipus crushed adaru-poplar seed (which contain salicylic acid, missing the acetyl group found in aspirin) to treat patients suffering from headaches. Amazing!!

These are but a few examples of the medical advancements ancient Assyrians made but still go relatively unnoticed. Having worked in the healthcare industry and knowing the various challenges involved, I find what our ancestors did to be both fascinating and a tremendous source of pride. I feel it proves that ancient Assyria was truly an advanced civilization and one of the clear pioneers in the area of medicine and so should be recognized. And one of proofs of how advanced is that these contributions were made thousands of years and have stood the test of time.

Assyrian Medical Tablet

Tablet K.8127+8439 [Plate AM-90 No. #1]
REVERSE COL. III

[Starting on Line 20] . . . If ditto, hellebore, **seed of Can-nabis**, *mint, the kazallu-plant, seed of *Solanurn, seed of daisy, together three grains each in honey of the mountains, oil and kurunnu-beer thou shalt mix, let it stand under the stars, in the morning before the sun he shall drink, stand on bitumen, look on lapis, cinnabar (carnelian), gold, silver, and he shall be freed. [Next Section] Line 24



[AM-90 #1 (K.8127 + 8438) Line 20]

Source: British Museum

ASSYRIAN NAMES

Boys names

- Bareil = Child/creation of El/god
- Barsin = Child/creation of Sin/Moon-god
- Elyamo = God of the Sea
- Giliana = Revelation; appearance; manifestation
- Mardokh = God of Babel/Babylon, God of sun, water, vegetation, magic etc.
- Nemrud = City of Assyria
- Sin = Moon
- Barshaina = Son of peace
- Gilgamesh = Sumerian king of city Uruk: 1/3 human and 2/3 god
- Anshar = Male principal
- Lamassu = Protective spirit in the form of Assyrian winged human-headed bull and lion colossi
- Lebario = Lion-hearted
- Enkidu = Friend of Gilgamesh
- Ur-Nammu = King of Ur
- Akkad = A region north of Sumer, included Babylon, Kish and Nippur
- Adad = Weather/Storm-god
- Rimush = King
- Ninurta = God of farmers and warriors

Girls names

- Ishtar = Goddess of Love (Akkadian) and of Babylon
- Inanna = Goddess of Love (Sumerian)
- Simta = Created
- Romrama = Greatness; exaltation
- Marganitha = Jewel
- Ninsun = Mother of Gilgamesh, Great Queen
- Nisaba = Grain-goddess; Goddess of writing, accounting and scribal knowledge
- Babylonia = City of Babel/ Babylon (fem.)
- Mimra = poetry; speech; discourse; sermon
- Ornina = fair
- Sbartha = derived from Patience
- Talita = fem. for student
- Shufrin = derived from beauty
- Nisha = goal
- Lilya = night
- Diyala = Assyrian region in Iraq
- Izla = from sugar cane (straw)
- Berolin = Pearl





Presidio Dance Theater

Interview with Judy George Breitschnider

By Tamara Odisho Benjamin, CA
 Pictures by www.pkbvisions.com

Presidio Performing Arts Foundation's (PPAF) mission is to preserve and present folkloric dance, music, and theater traditions in their historical context with a perspective that deepens impressions and knowledge of peoples, culture and art, creating an eloquent means of joining together performing arts, collective wisdom and social justice. The school is located in San Francisco, California. Their website is: <http://www.presidiodance.org/>

Tamara: How did you decide to create the Presidio Dance Theater?

Judy: I created the Presidio Performing Arts Foundation to help underserved children



have the chance to dance. I created an afterschool program, which is held in 3 SF districts, and also a scholarship program for students at The School of Presidio Dance Theatre

Tamara: Do you have a background in dance?

Judy: I've always loved dancing....from a little girl at the Assyrian parties....I studied tap but my passion was for piano and I was a student at the SF Conservatory of Music. I then continued in college as a piano minor.

Tamara: How long has it been in existence?

Judy: I started in 1997, and became a non-profit in 1998.

Tamara: Who attends the school?

Judy: From 2 years through seniors, we have classes for all ages and many dance specialties.

Tamara: What types of programs do you offer?

Judy: We have Presidio Dance Theatre, an adult professional production company; Presidio Dance Theatre Junior Company, middle-high school pre-professional

would be to help needy Assyrians and to help Assyrian students and schools.

Shortly after that Youel Baaba and Julius Shabbas joined the Foundation as members. During the election of officers for the 1966 year Youel was elected president, a position he held for many years thereafter. The following are briefly some of the concrete decisions and actions taken under Youel's leadership that helped establish the Assyrian Foundation of America on a solid basis that has led it to become the highly respected and trusted organization that it is today.

1. Updating and printing the bylaws.
2. Achieving nonprofit, tax-exempt status for the AFA.
3. All financial statements open to members.
4. Establishing the Building Fund and leading a fund raising event that allowed the Foundation to buy a building and lot in Berkeley.
5. A newsletter initiated by Youel started printing and publicizing Foundation activities. Later it was taken over by Julius Shabbas and developed into the beautiful *Nineveh* magazine that we are so proud of today.

Youel's passion and dedication to his people showed itself by concrete and constructive actions as well as writing and speaking. During the 1970s and 1980s there were more than 40 Assyrians working at Bechtel who were helped in getting their employment by Youel. He was truly a proud Assyrian who dedicated his life to assist Assyrians, to get jobs for workers as well as help authors and poets publish their writings. His good deeds for his people and his constructive contributions to them are appreciated by all who knew him and by those who became aware of his contributions.

We in the Assyrian Foundation of America are especially indebted to him and deeply appreciative of him for his work in establishing our organization on a solid basis that allowed us to grow and expand our ability to help our fellow Assyrians and support students and schools.



Left to Right - Catherine Pickering (Secretary), Youel Baaba (President), Nathan Nasser (Treasurer)

Remembering Youel Baaba:

A personal Story

By Dr. Joel Elias

It was December of 1967 and I was home one evening when the telephone rang. A man's voice said "Hello, my name is Youel Baaba. I would like to tell you about an organization we have called the Assyrian Foundation of America. Our purpose is to support students and needy Assyrians. We're having a meeting and I'd like to invite you to come and meet us." I told him that I was leaving in a couple of weeks for a one year sabbatical leave from the University to do research at the National Institutes of Health outside of Washington, D.C. and I was extremely busy getting ready to go with the whole family. He wished me good luck and said goodbye.

I came back at the end of 1968. One evening, a few weeks later, in the middle of January, the phone rang and a voice said "Hi, this is Youel Baaba, how was your sabbatical?" I was completely amazed. He said that the Foundation was having a dinner meeting at a restaurant in Berkeley on the next Sunday evening and invited me to come and meet everyone. I was so impressed by his dedication that I told him I would be there even though I was about to say I couldn't make it. That Sunday evening it was pouring rain and it was cold and dark as I stood in front of the door of the restaurant. I opened the door and stepped in, into the light and the warmth. But it was not just the warmth of the heaters that I felt but also the warmth coming from the group of Assyrians, looking at me and smiling in welcome. Then something startling happened within me as I stood there. I felt that this was a transformative moment - a sudden realization that I had come home. Until then I had been putting all my energy and thoughts into making it in the academic world of the university and not wanting to spend any effort with Assyrians. Now, standing there in the light in front of them, I realized that I could never be a whole person without bonding with my fellow Assyrians. I experienced the wonderful feeling of being a unified being. I will be eternally grateful to Youel for leading me to that epiphany.

Now it's Monday in early February and I'm visiting Youel at the hospital less than two days before he is to pass away. He is heavily sedated and under a lot of morphine for the pain. He is sleeping and Alice wakes him up and says "Youel, wake up, there's someone here to see you." With great effort he opens his eyes and looks at me, and Alice says "Do you know who this is?" And Youel says, "Of course. It's Dr. Elias."

That was the last time I saw Youel, but I have been thinking ever since of the first time I saw him and what a profound effect it had on my life. Thank you, Youel.

with both past and new members. They gave quite a few concerts in various areas of Chicago and performed many of Nebu's pieces, notably, an aria from his opera, *Semiramis*. A year later, his younger daughter, Nineveh was born and a few years later, Nebu was reunited with his son Tiglat, who made it to the United States after a perilous trip from revolutionary Iran.

Nebu established the *Schubert Northside Choir* in 1978, consisting of various neighbors from all walks of life. This choir had become a significant part of the local community of Sauganash, a suburb of Chicago, and was written in several local papers and newsletters for their various performances throughout Chicago. It was for his several years of community work and cultural awareness, both for Assyrians and Americans that Nebu was chosen as one of the twelve outstanding US citizens in 1979.

After spreading music in the Assyrian and American cultures of Chicago and looking for new opportunities to build the awareness of Assyrian and Western classical music, he and his family moved to California in 1985. During the first few years, Nebu was busy writing new compositions as well as bringing his youngest daughter, Nineveh, to the stage as a concert pianist. In 1987, Nineveh made her debut at the age of 13 with pieces by such composers as Chopin, Bach, Mozart and Schubert. Nebu's oldest daughter, Arbella, having made her debut at the age of 13 in Chicago as a concert block flutist (recorder), was also giving recitals, many with her sister. Nebu's son Tiglat, a very talented musician, studied briefly with his father and settled in Chicago, where he later studied composition at Northwestern University.

In 1995, Nebu was yearning for another choir and again,

reestablished the Nineveh Choir with some past but mostly new members. Their first concert was in 1996 in San Jose and later in Los Angeles. In December of 1997, the Nineveh Choir performed many of Nebu's nationalist works, such as *Roomraamaa*, the Assyrian National Anthem, Hail to Gilgamesh, an aria from Act III of his opera, *Gilgamesh*. But the Nineveh Choir was especially acclaimed for their performance of *Lacrymosa* (Crying), a piece from Nebu's Requiem.

During a long hiatus, Nebu had noticed much new talent in the younger generation throughout our community. He was yearning not only to reunite his beloved choir but also to unite all this wonderful new talent in one entity. His dream was to have a national choir that truly portrays the essence of our people; to have individuals from all walks of life, an array of age ranges, and various backgrounds; to have as many voices as possible.

Nebu gathered members not only from San Jose but also from Los Angeles, Modesto, and Turlock. Past members and new members came together, this time on a grander scale. It took over a year of hard work from the director and the singers. Traveling among these cities on an ongoing basis for a year, Nebu had claimed his dream. He takes great pride in the abundant talent that abides in our nation. The Nineveh Choir at long last evolved into the Assyrian National Choir, a body of nearly 50 amateur singers who have a passion for their nation, as well as a passion for Nebu's moving music.

In 2008, the Assyrian National Choir gave a memorable concert in San Jose, with a reintroduction of Nebu's *Roomraamaa*, the Assyrian National Anthem he had written years before. With *Roomraamaa*, Nebu tells us through music his love for his beloved nation and that we do not



Moussa (Moshe) Malki

An Assyrian Artist

Brussels, Belgium

By Joula Malki

Originally Assyrian (from the south-east region of Turkey, Tur-Abdin) his family had to flee their land following the massacres carried out by Sultan Abdul Hamid II from 1894 to 1896. These massacres left more than 100 000 dead (La Libre Belgique, 20th of August 1933; " An international crime: the Assyrian tragedy") as well as the genocide from 1915-1917 which annihilated the Christians of the Ottoman Empire and forced hundreds of thousands of Assyrians to flee for their survival. Moussa Malki was born in 1954 in Syria, a country artificially created from a colonial split of Assyria at the First World War. Son of an agricultural family, he created his first drawings at the primary school of his village at the age of six.

After his studies in the fine arts, at the prestigious Academy of Damascus in the late 70s, where he specialized in painting techniques, sculpture, architecture and drawing, he rigorously perfected the specific techniques of engraving and lithographs on metal, wood and linoleum. Having brilliantly submitted his theses, with the theme "The research of immortality" he worked for two years with professor Fathi (personal studio-Damascus).

Since 1986, he splits his time between teaching in artistic circles and his irresistible need to explore different types of painting and artistic shapes. His paintings are diversely created using conventional natural or chemical colors. He also hand-crafts his own wood blocks for his prints on fabric. The major theme of his work is the sharing of the Assyrian-Syrian cultural heritage with our contemporary civilization. Each one of his creations is unique and original.

Married and father to three children, he resides since 2003 in Belgium where he fervently pursues his quest for freedom of expression.

Main Exhibitions:

- 1989 Goteborg (Sweden)
- 1993 Berne-Schiller Gallery (Switzerland)
- 1994 Alep-Khanji Galerie (Syria)
- 1994 Frauenfeld (Switzerland)
- 1995 Damascus-Goethe Institut (Syria)
- 1995 Beirut-Tourism Ministry (Lebanon)
- 2000 Damascus-Al Bahl Gallery (Syria)



Assyrian Foundation of America
2010 Board of Directors
www.assyrianfoundation.org



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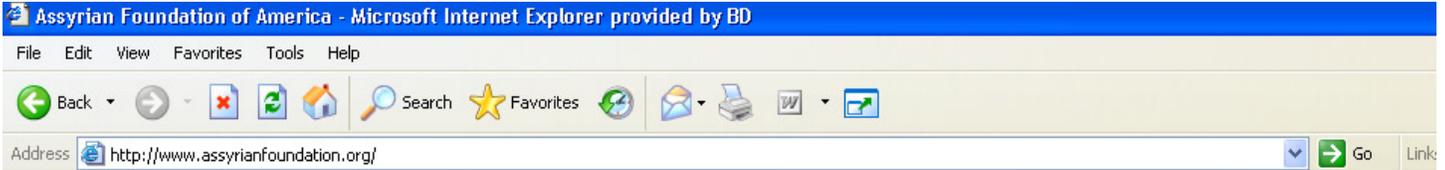
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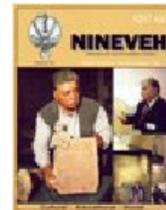
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ܩܘܠܘܢܐ
Thank You

Confiscation of Mor Gabriel Monastery Landmarks

Courtesy of: The Wall Street Journal/World and AINA

Condensed from original article

Tur Abdin, TURKEY -- Christians have lived in these parts since the dawn of their faith. But they have had a rough couple of millennia, preyed on by Persian, Arab, Mongol, Kurdish and Turkish armies. Each group tramped through the rocky highlands that now comprise Turkey's



southeastern border with Iraq and Syria.

The current menace is less bellicose but is deemed a threat nonetheless. A group of state land surveyors and Muslim villagers are intent on shrinking the boundaries of an ancient and functional monastery by more than half. The monastery, called Mor Gabriel (St. Gabriel), is revered by the Syriac Orthodox Church.

The St. Gabriel monastery, of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, was established in 397 AD, hundreds of years before its neighboring villages of Yayvantepe, Eglence and Candarli were founded. During the reign of the Ottoman Empire the monastery was officially declared as a foundation and is still legally regarded as such. The monastery is viewed by Assyrians as a "second Jerusalem". Since its establishment the monastery has developed and continuously improved its environment. Over the last three decades it has developed into a major center that attracts tens of thousands of visitors from Turkey and abroad. The entire region has benefited from this development. It is the seat of the metropolitan bishop of Turabdin and has also seven monks, and 14 nuns. It tutors 35 Assyrian school boys in Aramaic and religion but conducts no missionary activities.

Kurdish leaders from the villages of Yayvantepe, Eglence and Candarli, in cooperation with influential members of

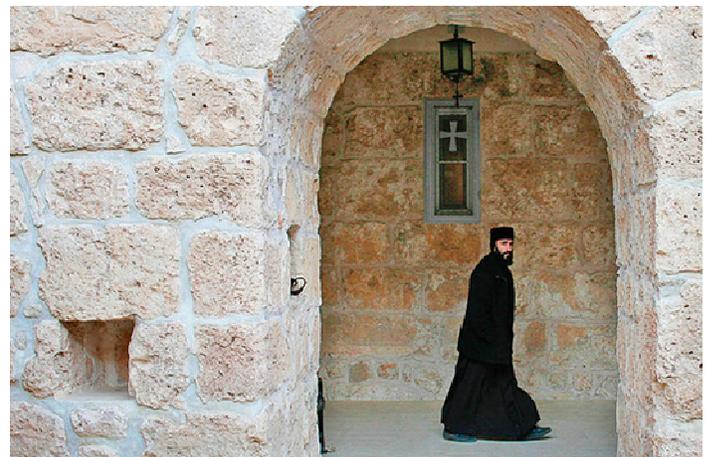
the ruling Justice and Development party (AKP), are now trying through dubious "lawful means" to confiscate the land of the monastery by claiming that the monastery has "too much" land for prayer and that land is needed as a meadow for these villages.



Battling to hang on to the monastic lands, Bishop Timotheus Samuel Aktas is fortifying his defenses. He's hired two Turkish lawyers -- one Muslim, one Christian -- and mobilized support from foreign diplomats, clergy and politicians. The outcome of the land dispute is now in the hands of a Turkish court. Seated below a bust of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, modern Turkey's secular founding father, a robed judge on Wednesday told the feuding parties that he would issue a ruling after he visits the disputed territory himself next month.

The trial comes at a critical stage in Turkey's 22-year drive to join the European Union. Under the radar is also the situation confronting members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, one of the world's oldest and most beleaguered Christian communities. The group's fate is now seen as a test of Turkey's ability to accommodate groups at odds with "Turkishness," a legal concept of national identity that has at times been used to suppress minority groups.

Bishop Timotheus Samuel Aktas says Turkey's claim to Mor Gabriel's land is an attempt to rid the country of As-



A Syriac Christian monk walks to attend a service at Mor Gabriel. The monastery is fighting over land it says it's had since the 4th century.

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No pen can ever tell of the atrocities that day.
The bitterness of those events it never could portray.
The misery we imagined from reports we later heard
Were more awful in reality than any spoken word.

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In the towns of all that region, history cannot deny,
From *Tur ʿabdīn* to *Urmi* came an urgent, brutal cry.
He who clings to his religion, the enemy cannot forgive.
Because of Christianity, no longer let him live.

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The snow was kneaded with our blood a hundred times its weight.
Our people preached of meekness through our apostolic faith,
But day by day our nation perished with our peaceful creed,
Oppressors took our blessing through the vileness of their deed.

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Two thirds of our ancient nation vanished in between
The 1914 exodus until 1918.
Marching first to Russia, to Iraq then turning back,
Until today our people are fleeing from attack.

كه لبتن سځن ټنه ټنه، خو لمبڼه ټنه ټنه
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From a dark and icy swamp came an anguished woman's shout,
Though she tried, her grandchild could not pull the woman out.
The girl ran on to summon help from the fleeing crowd,
But they arrived too late, her grandmother had drowned.

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An expectant mother stumbled, weighed down by her growing child.
She could not reach her family and was captured and defiled.
Her people found her crucified, her clothes and body torn.
As she dangled from the branches, a knife took her unborn.

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Barbarians seized the baby who hung above the wreck,
Tied up with her intestines wrapped 'round the mother's neck.
The slaughter of so many had filled the fields with crying,
Of orphaned youths who had escaped, the wounded and the dying.

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Upon the frozen vineyards lay thousands of the dead,
Some bodies sliced in two and countless torn to shreds.
A crawling infant was seen slipping over blood and snow,
From his mother's stiffening breast he sucked a final flow.

أَجْبَدُ لَهْبُومِ لَسْوَ لَهْلَهْتِي، فَرَجَ بَيْتِي دَتْنِي هَوْنَتِي
دَفْعَدُ لَنْبِ، وَكُهْمَتِي هَتِي، فَرَجَ يَذْفُ دَهْمَبْنِي دَقِي
يَمْنُ مَصْدُكُ مَهْبَتُ لَسْوَ، تَدَّأَتْ لَجَبْتُهُ مَوْلَتُ لَسْوَ
لَسْفَتُ مَفْرَجَ دُفْلِي لَسْوَ، فَفَرَقَ مَلِكُ لَسْوَ لَجَبْتُهُ

The men were tied to house posts before the children's eyes,
Forced by acts of inhumanity to watch their families die.
A mother's throat was slit; a daughter's clothes ripped by the hoard.
As her brother reached to help, his hands cut off by the sword.

يَدْفَعُ لَسْوَ لَسْوَ لَسْوَ، تَدْفَعُ دِيَّتِي كَبِي
كَبِي لَسْوَ لَسْوَ لَسْوَ، كَبِي لَسْوَ تَدْفَعُ نَسْبَتِي
وَذَكَ كَذَ لَسْوَ، يَهْمَبْنِي، يَمْعَمُ يِي كَسْ، يَهْمَبْنِي
تَبْنُ مَدْمَمُ مَدْمَمُ، كَمْعَمُ لَلْبَلْمُ مَدْمَمُ

Confused and dazed, some ran to find all their pathways blocked.
Panicked, stunned, and desperate, the door to freedom locked.
A hopeless mother fainted, her babe slain before her eyes,
They poured his blood inside her mouth, choking all her cries.

يَدْفَعُ لَسْوَ لَسْوَ لَسْوَ، تَدْفَعُ دِيَّتِي كَبِي
كَبِي لَسْوَ لَسْوَ لَسْوَ، كَبِي لَسْوَ تَدْفَعُ نَسْبَتِي
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تَبْنُ مَدْمَمُ مَدْمَمُ، كَمْعَمُ لَلْبَلْمُ مَدْمَمُ

Confused and dazed, some ran to find all their pathways blocked.
Panicked, stunned, and desperate, the door to freedom locked.
A hopeless mother fainted, her babe slain before her eyes,
They poured his blood inside her mouth, choking all her cries.

هَلْبُ جَدِّ هَسْوَ هَبْتِي، لَمْدَوُ دَانَمَدُّ مَكَبْتِي
كَلْ مَيُّ لَسْوَ، قَلْبُ مَدْمَمُ، هَيَدَسْوَ، هَلْ دَانِي مَدْمَمُ
وَذَكَ كَلْ لَسْوَ، دَتْنُ مَدْمَمُ، دَتْنُ مَدْمَمُ
تَبْنُ مَدْمَمُ، كَمْعَمُ قِي، وَكُهْمَتِي مَدْمَمُ كِي

Those that were too aged waited by the warm *tanoor*
They could not flee their houses, thus a violent death was sure.
Some offspring of these elders could not bear to leave,
They stayed beside their parents to suffer and to grieve.

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The Assyrian Genocide of the 20th Century

By Yosip Bet-Yosip, Turlock

English translation by
Maggie Yonan and Susan Nisan

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November had arrived and the winter cold set in.
No corner remained where drifting snow had not been.
The pale clouds were darkened, blackening the twilight sky.
The last light had fled, preparing for death to come by.

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In the region of *Urmia*, each farmer's work was through;
The harvest in the pantries and the bins stored up with food.
The dairies were well stocked; fields with winter wheat were sown.
The heaping plates abounded on the tables set to groan.

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As they feasted unaware, fields, and vineyards and roadway
Were blocked and barricaded where the enemy did lay.
Suddenly, from all sides, the dreaded foe attacked.
To slay the innocents and loot and flee with bounty packed.

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