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Assyrian New Year 6774

Stanislaus County Proclaims April as Assyrian Heritage Month

By Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.

In a heartwarming display of cultural recognition and unity, the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors proclaimed the month of April as Assyrian Heritage Month during their meeting that took place on Tuesday, March 26, 2024. This auspicious occasion, held at the Modesto City Hall Chambers, was graced by esteemed members and leaders of the Assyrian community, marking a significant milestone in the county's acknowledgment of the cultural richness offered by the local Assyrian community.

At the forefront of the event was Carmen Morad, representing the Assyrian Wellness Collaborative, in partnership with the Assyrian National Council of Stanislaus. In her speech, she acknowledged that Assyrians make up a proud and resilient community who have faced genocide, oppression and forced migration from their ancestral homelands. She also underlined the fact that over 130 years ago, Assyrians began settling in Stanislaus County with the help of the late Reverend Dr. Isaac Adams, seeking hope, opportunity and prosperity. Today, approximately 50,000 Assyrians call Stanislaus County home. Morad's poignant address to the board resonated deeply, expressing gratitude for the recognition of Assyrians' contributions to the county and the proclamation of April 2024 as Assyrian Heritage Month.

Morad's words encapsulated the resilience and pride of the Assyrian community, highlighting their journey from facing genocide and oppression, to flourishing as an integral part of Stanislaus County's fabric. With approximately fifty-thousand Assyrians calling Stanislaus County home, the proclamation served as a testament to the community's enduring spirit and invaluable contributions.

Among the distinguished individuals recognized during the event were prominent leaders from various Assyrian organizations, including Janet Atanous, Chair of the Assyrian Wellness Collaborative; Tony Vartan, Director of Stanislaus County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services; and Dr. Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber from the Assyrian National Council of Stanislaus County. Underscoring the collective effort to preserve and celebrate Assyrian heritage, the following individuals representing various Assyrian organizations were also present:

Sam Rasho
Assyrian Universal Alliance, central valley chapter

Hawel Hawel
Assyrian American Association of Modesto

Martin Youmaran
Assyrian American National Federation

Sharill Youkhaneh
Assyrian Aid Society of America, central valley chapter

Rowena d'Mar Shimun
Mar Shimun Foundation

Cyrus Amirfar & Sam David
former presidents of AACOT

Lazar Piro
founder of Assyrian National Council of Stanislaus County

Onita Narso
CCASYA and AYFA

ArchDeacon, Auchana Kanon, Holly Apostolic Catholic
Assyrian Church of the East

Rev. Edward Eissabake
St. John Assyrian Presbyterian Church, Turlock

Father Jameel Warda
Ancient Assyrian Church of the East, Turlock

Rev. Charles Barnabus
United Assyrian Evangelical Church, Turlock

A notable highlight of the celebration was the inspiring speeches delivered by two remarkable Assyrian youths, Mark and Zach Malek-Ismail. Mark eloquently recited his speech in Assyrian, emphasizing the importance of preserving the language, which holds significant historical and cultural significance. Meanwhile, Zach conveyed his message in English, representing the voice of Assyrian youth in the diaspora, bridging generational divides and fostering cultural continuity.

Dr. Ron Rodriguez, Dean of CSU Stanislaus Library Services, and Mary Weppler-Van Diver, Librarian of Special Collections and University Archives, also contributed to the event, showcasing the ongoing efforts to preserve Assyrian heritage through projects like the Sarguiz Modern Assyrian Heritage Project and Special Archives.

The event culminated with a heartfelt prayer led by His Grace Archdeacon Auchana Kanon of the Assyrian Church of the East, symbolizing unity, blessings, and a reaffirmation of the Assyrian community's enduring legacy.

As the ceremony concluded, it left an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of attendees, reaffirming the importance of cultural recognition, unity, and the celebration of diversity within Stanislaus County. The proclamation of Assyrian Heritage Month served as a beacon of hope, fostering inclusivity, understanding, and appreciation for the rich tapestry of Assyrian culture and tradition.



Armenian genocide remembered as Assyrians fight for acknowledgment of their plight

By: Jan Van der Made
Courtesy of www.rfi.fr

Overshadowed by the Armenian genocide that cost the lives of some 1,5 million people, and which is commemorated on 24 April, the experience of other minorities that were targeted by the Ottoman Empire is often forgotten. Yet a smaller group, which was almost wiped out is now trying to gain recognition for its plight.

"A lady, a relative of mine, escaped with her two daughters. Soon after, they were recaptured, and the two girls were carried away to slavery. Their mother died," writes Yonan Shahbaz, a Persian Baptist minister in his harrowing, 1918 diary.

His is one of the rare eyewitness accounts of the genocide of Oriental Christians - Assyrians - by Ottoman and Kurdish troops in 1915 and the years that followed in Urmia in present-day Iran.

"A neighbor of mine was soaked in oil and burned. A minister, more than eighty years of age, had his legs and arms sawed off. Another minister was murdered in the most horrible and revolting manner while his wife was compelled to witness the foul deed from the roof of their home. She died from the shock a little later.

"My own home was looted, then burned. The intruders burned all my books, my most valued treasure," Shahbaz added.

Protected by an American passport, he managed to escape the onslaught unleashed on Armenians, Assyrians (Oriental Catholics and Orthodox Christians as well as Nestorians and Protestants) and Pontic Greeks, whom the Turks, fighting WWI at the side of the Germans, suspected of being disloyal to the Ottoman government. He got out with his wife and one of his two children. The

other one disappeared in the chaos and was never heard of again.

Similar accounts - the gruesome and detailed descriptions by French Dominican father Jacques Rhétoré and the diary of then US Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Henry Morgenthau - substantiate the reports.

But memories of the mass killing of Oriental Christians, or "Seyfo" ("Sword") as the Assyrian genocide is called, quickly faded.

Assyrian confusion

When talking about Oriental Christians, "Assyrian," "Syriac," "Chaldean" and "Aramean" or combinations like "Assyro-Chaldean" are being used, sometimes interchangeably, sometimes in reference to specific characteristics.

Assyrians

Refers to the Assyrian People who trace their roots back to the Assyrian Empire, which is currently in northern Iraq, eastern Syria, south-eastern Turkey, and Urmia in Iran. Religion: the Nestorian Assyrian Church of the East.

Arameans

An ethnic group originating in an area straddling southwest Syria, northern Israel, and northern Jordan. They can be traced back to the Kingdom of Aram (ca 3000 BC) and speak Aramaic.

Chaldeans

Descendants of the Neo-Babylonian who are currently linked to the Chaldean Catholic Church with its See in Baghdad.



People hold French, Assyrian, and Cypriot flags on April 24, 2015, in Marseille, southeastern France, during a commemorative gathering marking the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. Armenians on April 24 marked the centenary of the massacre of up to 1.5 million of their kin by Ottoman forces as France called on Turkey to recognize the 1915 slaughter as genocide. AFP - BORIS HORVAT

Syriac

1. a liturgical language spoken by Assyrians, Arameans, and Chaldeans. It can refer to all of these ethnicities jointly, to make Arameans and Chaldeans,
2. Christians who are from an area between the western edge of Assyria and the eastern edge of Aram, in what is currently central Syria.
3. identifies Syriac Catholic or Orthodox Churches that use liturgy in the Syriac language

The Armenian genocide

Today, many countries around the world recognize the "Armenian genocide," where, according to figures published by the Yerevan-based Genocide Museum/Institute Foundation, some 1,5 million people died. France recognized the Armenian massacre in a law in 2001, and designated 24 April as the day of yearly commemoration in 2019.

Less, though, is known to the outside world, of the Oriental Christians who also lost some 250,000 people, or 75 percent of the total population. Why didn't they speak out? "It was fear," Professor Efrim Yildiz, founder of the Nineveh Chair of Salamanca University, told RFI.

"Assyrians in the diaspora were aware that the small part that has survived and stayed on (in Turkey) would be victimized."

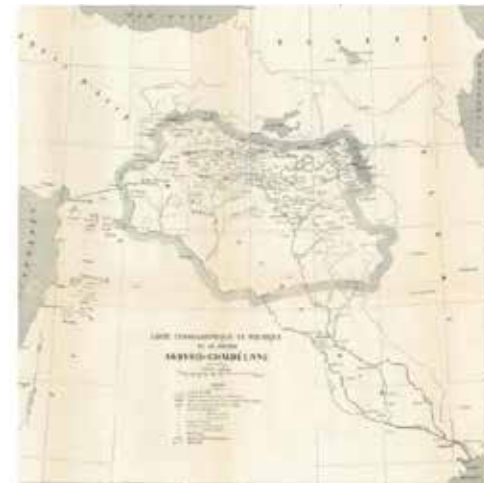
Unlike Armenia, which has its own country and a diaspora that is unified and well-established in many Western countries, the Assyrians don't have their own state and are divided into factions that don't always get along.

Today things are changing. According to Yildiz, there are only around 2,000 Assyrians left in Turkey, while the diaspora established the "Seyfo Center," which raises awareness about the Assyrian genocide.

Then in 2015 Oriental Christians stepped into the limelight when reports appeared of persecution by the Islamic State of Christian Yazidis in Iraq. Currently, France is at the forefront of pushing for an official recognition of the Assyrian genocide.

Why France?

Paris feels a special responsibility for the Oriental Christians, who are also called "Assyrians," "Assyro-Chaldeans" or "Syriacs," depending on which group you talk to.



Nestorians from the mountains in the Eastern part of the Ottoman empire. According to the diary of Yonan Shahbaz, thousands of Nestorians were haunted and killed by Ottoman troops and their Kurdish henchmen. © Yonan Shahbaz The Rage of Islam (1918)

Map of a prospective Assyro-Chaldean state as presented at the 1919 Paris peace conference. © Wikimedia Commons

By 1916, the UK and France had divided the Ottoman empire between them under the then secretive Sykes-Picot agreement. The region where most of the Oriental Christians lived was under the French governorship. After the end of WWI, lobbying was carried out by several minority groups (Kurds, Assyrians, Circassians, Armenians) in an attempt to establish or expand their territory. The Assyrians presented a map and were later promised a degree of autonomy in the Sèvres Treaty, signed in 1920.

The Sèvres Treaty stated that a combined French-English-Italian commission would travel to the region and draft a "scheme of local autonomy" containing "full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas," which largely fitted the demands of the Assyrian delegation.

The treaty also provided for a large extension westwards of Armenia. Large parts of the west coast, including Izmir were allotted to Greece, and Russia took control of Constantinople.

But the Sèvres Treaty was never ratified after major power shifts within Turkey which brought to power Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who solidified Turkey's present borders with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which nullified the Sèvres document. The Assyrians, but also the Kurds and the Armenians, were left in limbo.

Today, France is home to some 30,000 Assyrians. The first arrived in Marseille France in the 1920s as refugees from the "Seyfo" and the town still has the largest concentration in France.

On 11 March 2015, at the request of the Association of Assyrian-Chaldeans in France (AACF), the then UMP lawmaker (and Marseille-based) Valerie Boyer and 14 others submitted a bill recognizing the Assyrian genocide and asked for the 24 April to be designated as a date of commemoration - coinciding with the commemoration of the Armenian genocide which became official in 2019.

Who gets to be remembered under France's contentious 'memory laws'?

"The inclusion of Assyrians shows that there is now a consciousness in France that what happened in 1915 not only concerned Armenians, but also other Pontic Greeks and Assyrians," says Christophe Premat, a former lawmaker for France's Socialist Party and now an Assistant Professor with Stockholm University. "The war in Iraq affected this consciousness because people saw the issue of Oriental Christians. And that's why they wanted to enlarge the focus on the victims by naming the others. So that's a strong step forward."

France's "special responsibility"

The bill noted that the Syria/Iraq-based Islamic State armed group started persecuting local Christians, giving them the choice to convert to Islam, pay a special tax for



The Treaty Hall in the building that is today the Sèvres Ceramics Museum, where on 10 August 1920 France, the UK, Russia, and their allies signed the Sèvres peace treaty with Turkey. The treaty was never ratified. Nothing in the museum reminds me of the signing of the treaty, except for the name of the main hall, where the ceremony took place. © RFI/Jan van der Made

non-Muslims, flee and abandon everything, or "stay and be executed 'by the sword.'"

It then digs deep into history, citing France's "special responsibility" going back to the 1535 alliance between French Emperor François I with Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, when the Ottoman Empire helped the French fight Austria-Hungary while protecting Christians under Ottoman rule.

Boyer's bill demands that "France publicly recognizes the Assyrian genocide perpetrated during the First World War" and that 24 April be appointed as a day of commemoration.

POLITICS: France recognizes Seyfo Genocide of 1915 On Feb. 8, an Assyrian-Chaldean Genocide recognition bill was approved shortly after presentation to the French Senate.

: Maryam Ishaya (MIA '23)

: Senator Valérie Boyer

— **The Morningside Post (@morningsidepost)** February 27, 2023

In January 2023, the French Senate adopted the bill with 300 for and two votes against. One month later, MP Raphael Schellenberger (LR) presented the Assemblée Nationale with a bill, which, curiously, and unlike the first Boyer bill which cites the Lausanne Treaty, quotes the -now defunct- Sèvres treaty.

The bills are backed by mainly right-wing heavy-weight politicians such as former Prime Minister François Fillon and ex-President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Meanwhile, the discussions on the 1915 genocide repeatedly led to friction between Paris and Ankara. Turkey consequently talks about the "events of 1915" and rejects any criticism of the genocide as "null and void".

After the introduction of one of the French bills, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tanju Bilgic remarked that the claims "lack legal and historical basis" and that "Turkey does not need to take history lessons from anyone."

Parigi riconosce il «genocidio» degli assiro-caldei



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Nel 1915 vennero trucidati in 250mila. Ankara: senza fondamento «storico-giuridico»

DANIELE ZAPPALÀ
Parigi

Avanza, in Europa, il riconoscimento ufficiale di una delle più gravi tragedie novecentesche fin qui rimaste nell'ombra: il genocidio dei cristiani assiro-caldei (noti anche come siriaci, cattolici e ortodossi) durante la Prima Guerra mondiale, ad opera dei turchi, di cui la comunità internazionale ha già condannato il genocidio contro gli armeni, risalente agli stessi anni. L'Assemblea Nazionale, Camera bassa del Parlamento francese, ha appena approvato una risoluzione «sul riconoscimento e la condanna delle persecuzioni degli assiro-caldei del 1915 come genocidio». I deputati transalpini, fra l'altro, esortano a stabilire «le responsabilità e riparazioni legittime». Anche a tal fine, si dovrà «incoraggiare sulla scena internazionale un accesso libero agli archivi», oltre a un «lavoro di memoria» ad opera di scuole e mondo della cultura. Come già nel caso del genocidio armeno, si tratta di posizioni denunciate

subito dal governo turco, con un comunicato del Ministero degli Esteri che ricalca quanto già espresso dal presidente Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Per Ankara, le accuse sono «senza fondamento giuridico e storico», anche perché «i parlamenti non hanno autorità per interpretare o giudicare la storia». Inoltre, la risoluzione «deforma degli eventi storici in nome d'interessi politici». Ma gli storici indipendenti, citando i documenti disponibili, considerano irrefutabili i massacri deliberati turchi che provocarono la morte di circa 250mila assiro-caldei, ovvero la metà di un intero popolo, basato fra Iraq (come nella Piana di Ninive), Turchia e Siria attuali. Questi cristiani d'Oriente, in buona parte in comunione con Roma, sono pure considerati i custodi dell'aramaico, la lingua di Gesù. Fra gli intellettuali assiro-caldei presenti in Francia che si sono maggiormente battuti per questo riconoscimento, figura lo studioso Joseph Yacoub, professore onorario all'Università Cattolica di Lione.

© RIPRODUZIONE RISERVATA



Courtesy of *Avvenire*, Rome, Italy

Friday, May 3, 2024

THE TURN ON THE PERSECUTION OF CATHOLIC AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS

Paris recognizes the "genocide" of the Assyrian-Chaldeans

In 1915, 250,000 were slaughtered. Ankara: without 'historical-legal' basis.

By DANIELE ZAPPALÀ

Paris

Advancing in Europe is the official recognition of one of the most serious tragedies of the twentieth century that has so far remained in the shadows: the genocide of the Assyrian-Chaldean Christians (also known as Syriacs, Catholics, and Orthodox) during the First World War, at the hands of the Turks, of which the international community has already condemned the genocide against the Armenians, dating back to the same years.

The National Assembly, the lower house of the French Parliament, has just approved a resolution 'on the recognition and condemnation of the persecutions of the Assyrian-Chaldeans in 1915 as genocide.' Among other things, the French deputies urge to establish 'the responsibilities and legitimate reparations.' Also, for this purpose, there should be 'encouragement for free access to archives' on the international stage, as well as 'memory work' by schools and the cultural world. As was the case with the Armenian genocide, these are positions denounced immediately by the Turkish government, with a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that echoes what President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had already expressed. The accusations are, according to Ankara, the accusations are 'without legal and historical foundation,' also because 'parliaments do not have the authority to interpret or judge history.' Furthermore, the resolution 'distorts historical events in the name of political interests.'

But independent historians, citing available documents, consider the deliberate Turkish massacres that caused the death of about 250,000 Assyrian-Chaldeans, or half of an entire population, based between present-day Iraq (such as in the Nineveh Plain), Turkey, and Syria. These Eastern Christians, largely in communion with Rome, are also considered the custodians of Aramaic, the language of Jesus. Among the Assyrian-Chaldean intellectuals in France who have fought most for this recognition is the scholar Joseph Yacoub, honorary professor at the Catholic University of Lyon.

Translated by Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.

L'Assemblée nationale a reconnu lundi le génocide dont a été victime cette communauté chrétienne d'Orient. De 1915 à 1918, quelque 250.000 Assyro-Chaldéens ont été massacrés par les Ottomans.

Lundi, l'Assemblée nationale a mis fin à plus d'un siècle d'oubli et d'ignorance en adoptant la proposition de résolution « portant sur la reconnaissance et la condamnation des persécutions des Assyro-Chaldéens de 1915 comme génocide ». Un peu plus d'un an après que le Sénat a ouvert la voie en votant un texte similaire en février 2023.

Dans les tribunes, nombre de personnes présentes pouvaient savourer un succès auquel elles ont largement contribué. Au premier rang desquelles les représentants des associations historiques de cette communauté présente en France depuis des décennies, l'Association des Assyro-Chaldéens de France (AACF) et l'Union des Assyro-Chaldéens de France (UACF).

Mais aussi les membres de l'Union syriaque d'Europe ou encore François Pupponi, ancien député du Val d'Oise et maire de Sarcelles, où la communauté est très implantée. Sans oublier naturellement l'historien Joseph Yacoub, accompagné de son épouse Claire, dont le travail a été salué par plusieurs parlementaires et par la représentante du gouvernement, Chrysoula Zacharopoulou, secrétaire d'État chargée du Développement et des Partenariats internationaux.

LFI seule à s'abstenir

À l'exception notable de La France Insoumise, qui a prôné l'abstention, l'ensemble des groupes parlementaires, du Rassemblement national aux communistes en passant par les écologistes, ont voté en faveur de cette résolution portée depuis des années par Les Républicains, à l'initiative du vote du Sénat en février 2023.

À l'époque, le gouvernement n'avait au demeurant pas approuvé la résolution sénatoriale. Mais il a bien soutenu lundi le texte présenté à l'Assemblée par Sylvain Maillard, président du groupe Renaissance. Au cours d'un débat serein, LFI se sera donc distinguée par la voix de ses représentants Carlos Martens Bilongo et Sébastien Delogu dénonçant un groupe Renaissance et « une alliance des droites » animés par une « haine des musulmans » et par une volonté « de diviser les communautés » en favorisant « un choc des civilisations » ...

Le reste des interventions a été plus en accord avec un moment historique. La grande majorité des députés étaient visiblement conscients que leur vote était « un message fort adressé au monde » pour reprendre la formule de la représentante LR du Maine-et-Loire, Anne-Laure Blin, l'une des chevilles ouvrières du projet. Ce qui n'a pas empêché que, dans cette unanimité, chacun exprime sa sensibilité et ses préoccupations.

Hommage sincère et solennel du gouvernement

Ainsi d'Anne-Laure Blin appelant, avec plusieurs autres parlementaires, à soutenir des Chrétiens d'Orient toujours « menacés de mort », de la députée de Vendée Véronique Besse appelant à « l'honnêteté intellectuelle sur le génocide vendéen » ou du communiste Stéphane Peu dénonçant les « promesses non tenues [dont la protection des Assyro-Chaldéens] par les puissances impérialistes » et le chaos créé par ces mêmes puissances dans la région après la première guerre mondiale. Sans oublier le RN Alexandre Sabatou lançant que « les martyrs assyro-chaldéens appelaient à faire preuve de courage devant l'islamisme ».

Comme il sied en démocratie, les opinions divergeaient donc. Mais l'essentiel n'était pas là en ce 29 avril 2024. Prenant la parole, la secrétaire d'État Zacharopoulou, née à Sparte, a présenté « au nom du gouvernement français un hommage sincère et solennel » aux morts et aux persécutés de 1915-1918. Et ces ombres surgies du passé ont alors pris une autre dimension.

Reste maintenant à mettre en œuvre les dispositions de la résolution : « l'établissement des responsabilités et des réparations légitimes », la reconnaissance officielle par le gouvernement français, le « libre accès aux archives sur la scène internationale » et un « travail de mémoire, en particulier à travers l'enseignement et la culture ». Autant de points qui irritent déjà fortement Ankara qui persiste à nier tout projet génocidaire ottoman contre les populations chrétiennes. La Turquie a dénoncé dans la foulée « des accusations sans fondement juridique et historique », jugeant la résolution « nulle et non avenue ». « Les parlements n'ont aucune autorité pour interpréter ou porter un jugement sur l'histoire », écrit dans un communiqué le ministère turc des Affaires étrangères, pour qui ce texte « déforme des événements historiques au nom d'intérêts politiques ».

On Monday, the National Assembly recognized the genocide suffered by this Eastern Christian community. From 1915 to 1918, some 250,000 Assyrian-Chaldeans were massacred by the Ottomans.

On Monday, the National Assembly put an end to over a century of oblivion and ignorance by adopting the resolution proposal "on the recognition and condemnation of the persecutions of the Assyrian-Chaldeans of 1915 as genocide." A little over a year after the Senate paved the way by voting on a similar text in February 2023.

In the galleries, many individuals present could savor a success to which they had contributed significantly. Foremost among them were representatives of the historical associations of this community present in France for decades, such as the Association of Assyrian-Chaldeans of France (AACF) and the Union of Assyrian-Chaldeans of France (UACF).

Also present were members of the Syriac Union of Europe and François Pupponi, former deputy of Val d'Oise and mayor of Sarcelles, where the community is well established. Not to forget, naturally, historian Joseph Yacoub, accompanied by his wife Claire, whose work was praised by several parliamentarians and by the government representative, Chrysoula Zacharopoulou, Secretary of State for Development and International Partnerships.

LFI (La France Insoumise) alone abstained

With the notable exception of La France Insoumise, which advocated abstention, all parliamentary groups, from the Rassemblement National to the Communists, including the Greens, voted in favor of this resolution, championed for years by Les Républicains, following the Senate's initiative in February 2023.

At the time, the government had not approved the senate resolution. However, on Monday, it did support the text presented to the Assembly by Sylvain Maillard, president of the Renaissance group. During a serene debate, LFI stood out through the voices of its representatives Carlos Martens Bilongo and Sébastien Delogu, denouncing the Renaissance group and "a right-wing alliance" driven by "hatred of Muslims" and a desire "to divide communities" by promoting "a clash of civilizations"...

The rest of the interventions were more in line with a historic moment. The vast majority of deputies were clearly aware that their vote was "a strong message to the world," to borrow the words of LR (Les Républicains) representative from Maine-et-Loire, Anne-Laure Blin, one of the driving forces behind the project. However, even in this unanimity, each expressed their sensitivity and concerns.

Sincere and solemn tribute from the government

Anne-Laure Blin called, along with several other parliamentarians, to support the Christians of the East who are still "threatened with death," Vendée deputy Véronique Besse called for "intellectual honesty about the Vendée genocide," and Communist Stéphane Peu denounced the "unkept promises [including the protection of Assyrian-Chaldeans] by imperialist powers" and the chaos created by these same powers in the region after the First World War. Not to mention RN (Rassemblement National) Alexandre Sabatou stating that "the Assyrian-Chaldean martyrs called for courage in the face of Islamism."

As is appropriate in a democracy, opinions therefore diverged. But the essence was not there on April 29, 2024. Taking the floor, Secretary of State Zacharopoulou, born in Sparta, presented "on behalf of the French government a sincere and solemn tribute" to the dead and persecuted of 1915-1918. And these shadows from the past then took on another dimension.

Now, the provisions of the resolution must be implemented: "establishing responsibilities and legitimate reparations," official recognition by the French government, "free access to archives on the international stage," and "memory work, especially through education and culture." These points already strongly irritate Ankara, which persists in denying any Ottoman genocidal project against Christian populations. Turkey promptly denounced "accusations without legal or historical basis," considering the resolution "null and void." "Parliaments have no authority to interpret or pass judgment on history," the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement, arguing that this text "distorts historical events in the name of political interests."

Translation into English by Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.

Assyrian Genocide Oral History Project

www.international.ucla.edu

The Assyrian Genocide (Seyfo) Oral History Project is co-led by the Armenian Genocide Research Program within the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA and the Assyrian Genocide Research Center (SEYFO CENTER).

The Assyrian people represent one of the groups targeted by the genocide that the Ottoman Empire carried out against its Christian citizens during World War I. The genocidal policies towards the Assyrians, also known as the Seyfo, resulted in thousands of innocent Assyrians being brutally murdered, tortured, exiled, and forced to struggle with hunger, thirst, and disease.

The effects of the Assyrian genocide on the communities that survived in their homeland or became scattered throughout the world are still being felt and therefore must be remembered. The Assyrian genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire and its Kurdish tribes between 1914-1923 constitutes a crime against humanity. However, the effects of the Seyfo, which left deep traces on the cultural and social structure of Assyrian society, have not been sufficiently documented or studied. One of the main reasons for this is that, until recently, there were very limited written sources on the subject.

To fill this resource gap to some extent, the Armenian Genocide Research Program within the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA and Seyfo Center spearheaded a project called, "The Assyrian Genocide Oral History Project." The goal of the project is to incorporate the gathered research into the collections of foundations working on the subject and make it accessible to the public.

Although there have been studies conducted on the experience of the Assyrians, there is no systematic archive that can be used to study the Seyfo. This project aims to archive the events that took place during and after the 1915 genocide, as well as the experiences of the Assyrian survivors, through oral interviews and to pass them on to future generations.

The Assyrian Genocide Oral History Project aims to (1) digitize the rare interviews of Assyrian genocide witnesses and eyewitnesses recorded within the last 30 years; (2) translate them into various languages, including English; and (3) transcribe and index them to provide ease of research. The ultimate goal is to create the first digital Assyrian genocide archive.

This digital archive will not only help us understand the painful past of the Assyrian people, but it will also remind us of the devastating consequences of the massacres and contribute to the historical memory of humanity.

The success of this project is shaped not only by our technical work, but also by the contributions of our valued supporters. If you have access to any previous oral and written interviews about the Seyfo, we kindly request that you please contribute the materials to this archive project. Each contribution will be acknowledged accordingly.

We aim to integrate the Assyrian genocide digital archive into the existing collection of digital archives, especially the Armenian digital archives, enhancing the resources available for research and education on this topic. We hope to make the historical memory of the Assyrians a part of the global genocide memory history and pass it on to future generations.

Dr. Taner Akçam

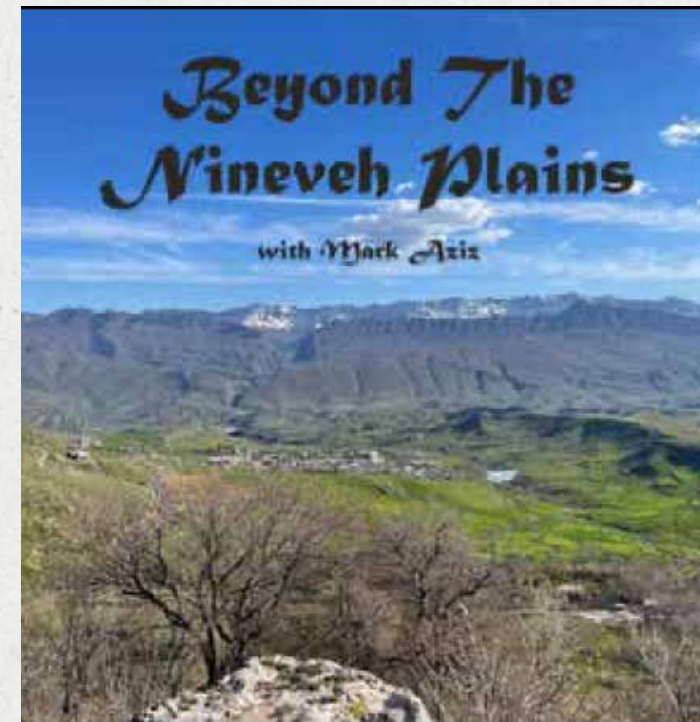
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Committee Members

- Feyyaz Kerimo, *Oral History Project Coordinator*
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- Abboud Zeitoune
- Dr. Sophia Isaac

HOT OFF THE PRESS! **Beyond the Nineveh Plains Podcast**



As part of his Master's degree in Communications at San Jose State University, Mark Aziz conducted a project entitled "Beyond the Nineveh Plains." Therein, he interviewed three influential Assyrians: Savina Dawood from the non-profit organization Etuti, Youkhannan Badal Piro, Priest at the Mar Narsai Parish of the Assyrian Church of the East in San Francisco, and Dr. Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, who serves as Assistant Editor of Nineveh Magazine, Secretary of the Assyrian National Council of Stanislaus, and a longstanding Member of the Assyrian Foundation of America. The main focus of his project is the significance of storytelling within the Assyrian community. You can listen to his podcast interviews by visiting:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/beyond-the-nineveh-plains/id1746417029>

or

<https://open.spotify.com/show/71Y5soEJTU7ZtGN3H5pPFA>



Assyrian Youth Unite: Building Community Through Shared Experiences

By Deena Sada

On February 24th, the American Youth Federation Organizations of San Jose and Central Valley (Qooyama and the Central California Assyrian Student & Youth Association) had the opportunity to come together and attend the NHL San Jose Shark's versus Nashville Predators game! And despite the Shark's loss, we all had a blast.

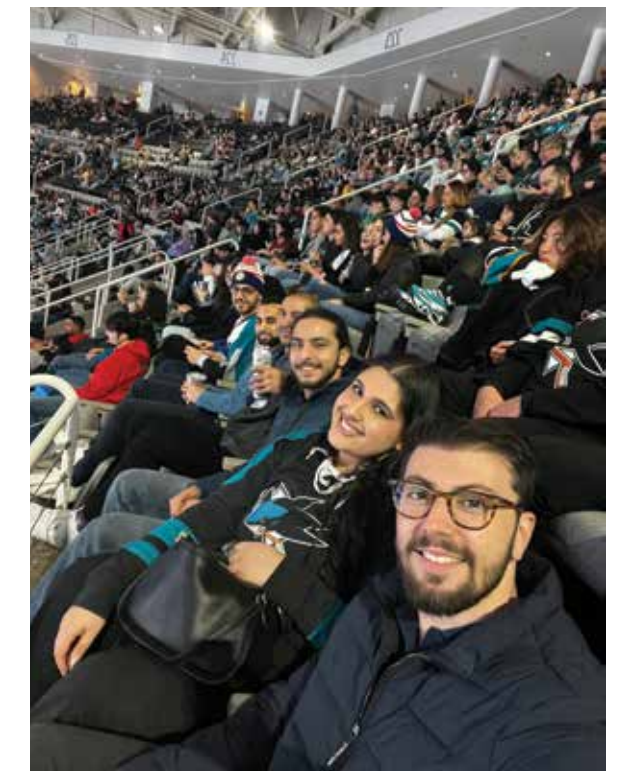
Qooyama is the Assyrian youth organization of San Jose, which has recently regrouped and restarted their events over the past year. Qooyama members organized for 25 people from both San Jose and Turlock to attend the hockey game as a means of coming together.

CCASYA is the long standing student & young adult organization for Assyrians in California's Central Valley area. They have a wide board of loyal members who are actively committed to bringing the Assyrian community together.

This was not the first shared group event between CCASYA and Qooyama, and it will not be the last! Our organizations are committed to creating fun environments and enjoyable events to share with one another. As students and emerging adults, we all find ourselves very busy with hectic schedules. We now have far less time to socialize and have fun than we did as children.

It is important to make time for positive social events and gatherings, but even more-so within our own community. With minimal time for fun, we hope our fellow Assyrian youth will opt to choose one another to spend their time with. We work to bring ourselves together in the name of camaraderie, as well as forming lifelong friendships within our small but precious community.

If you are a young Assyrian trying to get involved with your community, please look into AYFA's other regional organizations that may be near you. We can all continue to work together and set each other up to be strong and active members in our community, as well as friends in each other's lives.



SADDAM HUSSEIN AND NEBUCHADNEZZAR

By Elvin Envieh Golpashin

Despite being the progenitors of some of the greatest philosophies and stories known to man, the inhabitants of the Fertile Crescent (and by extension, the diasporas of these nations) today remain ignorant of the patterns they live through on a daily basis, both individually and collectively. Perhaps the most tragic and catastrophic example of these is that of the Iraqi people and he who led them to the fallout of it all: Saddam Hussein. The ego of this man is incarnate throughout all of the ruins of ancient Babylon, even after his death.

There exists an idea in Jungian psychology that lest you become conscious of the myths and archetypes you are unconsciously acting out, that they will lead to your ruin, as their designated endpoint may not be your desired outcome. In the case of Saddam Hussein, they led to the ruin of his entire nation—to the destruction of every minority and majority alike, north and south of Iraq, and to the disbursement of the ancient community of the Assyrian people.

His claims of being the reincarnation of Nebuchadnezzar II should have been treated more seriously, as the results brought about by his policies were no different than that of the mythologized king's. One can say mythologized because the Biblical Nebuchadnezzar II serves to highlight an archetype, while the historical does not necessarily do so, though connections between the two may be gleaned by scholars. The pattern was very clear as to what would have happened to Iraq should the policies of the nationalistic Baathists have continued towards the fanatical and religious ideals that enveloped Iraq in 2014. Preceding the Sunni hegemony in Iraq was the power of the largest empire known to man: the British Empire. The Sunni power was the inheritor of the British Protectorate of Iraq, in the same manner that the Neo-Babylonian kings were the inheritors of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the very first model of empire. And in the same way that the mythologized Nebuchadnezzar II lost his kingship (and his mind) to the younger, up-and-coming power of the Achaemenids, Saddam lost Iraq, its people, its heritage, and its resources, to

Western imperial ambitions and corporatism, and likewise, its politics and self-determination to Iran. Such are the magnified dangers when ego-possession takes hold of a man with absolute power.

The fact that towards the end of his reign, Saddam Hussein was becoming more keenly aware of the story he had been telling, himself correctly diagnosing it as the mythologized story of King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon, hints that this was likely a confession and even warning from the deepest subconscious of the man to the nation that

he led, for anyone that knew the Biblical myth of Nebuchadnezzar would have foreseen the dangers in likening one's self to the archetype of the ancient mad king. After the Achaemenid takeover and historical co-opting of the Mesopotamian ruling style (Persians having brought back many ancient Assyrian royal rituals such as the royal seals of the king), the Mesopotamian people as a whole, be they the northern Assyrians, central Akkadians, or Sumer to the south, underwent a period of bondage and even irrelevancy as their innovations were taken up and mantled by a new, Iranic peoples. Seeing as how Iraq has now lost control of its waters and rivers to Turkey, control of its resources to corporatist interests, and control of its politics to Iran, the Biblical patterns and archetypes have been fulfilled.

Unfortunately, the patterns one treads in life are only ever brought to consciousness once their results have already been reaped. All of this to say that Iraqis, not just Assyrians, must now be aware of the stories that they are telling both short-term and long-term, both individually and collectively. If a people fail to listen to the stories their leaders are telling them consciously or unconsciously, then the fallout of their actions will not only first and foremost be reaped by themselves, but so too will the steep price paid. One thing is clear: Assyrians cannot afford to repeat or allow to repeat the dire mistakes and tragedies of the past. Assyrians must become aware of the stories their leaders are telling them now, before it is too late.



Above image: Coin depicting the likenesses of Saddam Hussein and Nebuchadnezzar II, side by side.

Nahum 3:18-19 KJV: "Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them."



The most recent uncovered parts of Babylon. Unfortunately, funding for exploring this area has stopped since 2003 and the archeologist is unable to continue his work. To the left can also be seen the abandoned ruins of Saddam's palace. The symbolism of the palace is not lost, as it is set atop a hill overlooking the ancient city.



These portions of the walls are perhaps the most genuine, not having been reconstructed during the Saddam era.



Another of more than a hundred plaques commissioned by Saddam to commemorate his reign—this one being already worn out.



In the court of the king, where Nebuchadnezzar II would have been seated. The vast majority of the bricks come from the era of Saddam.



One of the many narrow corridors in Babylon. This one well exemplifies the impoverished state of the original bricks of Babylon holding up the weight of the newly laid Saddam-era bricks.



The replica of the Gate of Babylon, built by Saddam Hussein, ironically at the real Babylon. The original gate was taken to Berlin, and some of its pieces were lost at sea in the transportation process.



A prime example of the damage wrought upon Babylon's ruins by Saddam's vanity project. The best way to tell if the portions of the walls are original is by the obvious darker hues at the base of the wall. According to the archeologist, these portions of the walls cannot be further excavated due to the weight of the new bricks on top. In fact, here lies one of the narrower gates of Babylon, forever buried underneath by Saddam.

I am Ashurbanipal, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria

By: Robert Ewan



The British Museum's blockbuster exhibition on the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, one of history's greatest rulers, took place between November 8, 2018 and February 24, 2019. The exhibition told the story of Ashurbanipal through the British Museum's unique collection of Assyrian treasures.

Ashurbanipal was not a romantic conqueror. He was a warrior and a scholar, capable of mercilessly obliterating his enemies and of ethereal creation. Destroying the Egyptian city of Thebes and enslaving its inhabitants were equally as important to him as accumulating books for his library, which at 10,000 works was the largest collection of its time. He is possibly the only person in history to have been both a librarian and a warrior. He is depicted with a stylus, a writing instrument, tucked into his belt, proclaiming the pen to be as mighty as the sword. Shortly after his mysterious death, the Assyrian empire fell, and the great city of Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC, its ruins lost to history.

Technology is used in the exhibition, which makes it come to life. Projecting colours on some of the reliefs helps them look just as they would have done when they were originally painted. A blue aqueduct breathes fresh life into the green vegetation around it, and Assyrian gods look resplendent in their white robes. It's smartly done, for instance, when visitors switch to the battle scenes and war drums kick in from the speakers, bringing dramatic flair to the telling of these tales of war and death. You almost expect the figures in front of you to animate and start moving.

Eye-blistering friezes show Ashurbanipal fighting lions to prove his superhuman virility. Lions are shown being shot at close range with arrows or speared in the neck. There are some dazzling reliefs of crowded battle scenes and an impressive cabinet of cuneiform tablets, which were originally part of his great library



that contained works of literature, soothsaying and magic. Other cuneiform texts include letters that shed light on such diverse topics as sibling rivalry, Assyrian board games, teaching, and the training of the king. There is also his letter to his father written when he was 13, describing how he has

been learning all the proper skills for a king. How often do you get so close to objects personally used by one of the great figures of ancient history?

On one tablet he writes, 'I am able to recognise celestial and terrestrial omens and can discuss them in an assembly of scholars. I am capable of arguing with expert diviners... I can resolve complex mathematical divisions and multiplications that do not have an easy solution. I have read cunningly written texts in obscure Sumerian and Akkadian that are difficult to interpret. I have carefully examined inscriptions on stone from before the Deluge that are sealed, stopped up, and confused'. Ashurbanipal's library was destroyed by fire in the destruction of Nineveh at the end of the seventh century BC, but clay tablets don't burn. They were hardened and preserved by the heat.

Dr Gareth Brereton, Curator of Mesopotamia and of this exhibition, said: "It has been a wonderful experience, and the exhibition has been a tremendous success and well over-subscribed. The exhibition gives an insight into the life and legacy of kind Assurbanipal."

Large crowds attended the final day; Assyrians from worldwide communities were present and took an active role in concluding this exhibition. They took great pride in having their culture and heritage displayed in the world's most famous museums.

The Assyrian community of the UK participated in this exhibition through their folk-dance group. The dancers' chanting voices reverberated throughout the museum hall. The sounds of the pulsating Dawolah (drum) accompanied





by a shrilling Zurna (flute) echoed throughout the morning and afternoon. Their dancing inspired curiosity about Assyrian heritage from the audience.

The acclaimed Nineveh dance group from the Assyrian cultural club of Gutersloh, Germany, gave electrifying performances. Their energetic, fast-paced dance routines

dazzled the audience. They wowed the audience with their take on Khazadde (the Reapers') song. The group, dressed in colourful traditional Assyrian customs, performed the characteristic rhythms of Assyrian folk music, drawing audiences with their theatrical musicality. The Nineveh group was set up over three years ago, and it performs regularly at festivals and special cultural events.



The Assyrian Swedish-based fashion designer Nahreen Odisho applied conventional motifs in her representation of female Assyrian dresses. The designer took great pains to portray the decorative patterns. The Assyrian dresses were lavishly decorated, some covered with intricate ornamentation. Woven and embroidered patterns and fringes were used with in great profusion. The designer, Nahreen Odisho, and her models walked the catwalk under the eyes of Lamassu.

Some colourful Assyrian customs from various Assyrian regions were on display, courtesy of Mrs Julia Cherri. She has dedicated years to researching different forms of Assyrian traditional clothing. There were some moving poetry recitals performed by Nineb Lamassu and Jamie Osborn, and by Breitel Suleiman from Australia with her soprano voice.



A thrilling music concert was performed by members of the Gilgamesh Arts and Culture foundation. Several Assyrian songs were performed, sending mellifluous echoes around the great museum. The audience seemed overcome with spiritual rapture, as though the music had raised them to the highest heaven.

Nineb Lamassu, Director of the Assyrian Language and Culture Trust, which was the main supporter of this exhibition, said: "We worked hard to showcase Assyrian



continuity through art and culture; I personally would like to thank everyone involved. I have been blessed and honoured to have worked with such an amazing, selfless group of individuals. We have worked very hard as an international team of dedicated individuals to make this happen, and we have had the moral and financial support of the public and prestigious Assyrian and non-Assyrian Associations."

He added: "We have had so much support from the Assyrian and non-Assyrian public at large; support from people we never knew nor expected anything from. Everyone's dedication can't be measured, especially not in monetary value; everyone's dedication is manifested by Rabita Julia Cherri: she was hospitalised, yet she directed her display of Assyrian traditional costumes right from her hospital bed. What an example of a true and a great human spirit. I thank the British Museum for the wonderful 'I am Ashurbanipal' exhibition and for working with the Assyrian community of the UK and other parts of the world to make sure that modern Assyrians were included in such an international exhibition that focuses on their ancient and most revered king."

As the moon scattered its gleaming light on the museum. Ashurbanipal's majestic roaring voice rang concussively in my ears:

I am Ashurbanipal; I ruled the largest empire that the world had ever seen. The mighty gods granted me outstanding strength. I crushed my enemies and made them bow down before me. I held the bow and made arrows fly and pierced the throats of raging lions. I am Ashurbanipal, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria.



Robert Ewan is an Assyrian- British journalist and author based in London. He has contributed many articles to the British media. He is the author of "Doves in Crimson fields, Iraqi Christian martyrs" and "O creator of light" a collection of prayers and hymns of the Church of the East.





Details of the lamassu and palace reliefs of Neo-Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal (883-859 BC) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

A weird, sometimes bloody ritual kept kings 'safe' during ancient eclipses

The Babylonians — more than 2,000 years ago — calculated there were 38 possible eclipses or syzygys within a period of about 18 years.

By Gonzalo Rubio, The Conversation | Published: March 19, 2024

On April 8, millions of Americans will be able to see the magic of a total solar eclipse.

Humans have been alternatively amused, puzzled, bewildered and sometimes even terrified at the sight of this celestial phenomenon. A range of social and cultural reactions accompanies the observation of an eclipse. In ancient Mesopotamia (roughly modern Iraq), eclipses were in fact regarded as omens, as signs of things to come.

For an eclipse to take place, three celestial bodies must find themselves in a straight line within their elliptical orbits. This is called a syzygy, from the Greek word "súzygos," meaning yoked or paired. From our viewpoint on Earth, there are two kinds of eclipses: solar and lunar. In a solar eclipse, the moon passes in between the sun and Earth, which results in blocking our view of the sun. In a lunar eclipse, it is the moon that crosses through the shadow of the Earth. A solar eclipse can completely block our view of the sun, but it is usually a brief event and can be observed only in certain areas of the Earth's surface;

what can be viewed as a total eclipse in one's hometown may just be a partial eclipse a few hundred miles away.

By contrast, a lunar eclipse can be viewed throughout an entire hemisphere of the Earth: the half of the surface of the planet that happens to be on the night side at the time.

Eclipses as omens

More than two thousand years ago, the Babylonians were able to calculate that there were 38 possible eclipses or syzygys within a period of 223 months: that is, about 18 years. This period of 223 months is called a Saros cycle by modern astronomers, and a sequence of eclipses separated by a Saros cycle constitutes a Saros series.

Although scientists now know that the number of lunar and solar eclipses is not exactly the same in every Saros series, one cannot underplay the achievement of Babylonian scholars in understanding this astronomical phenomenon. Their realization of this cycle eventually allowed them to predict the

occurrence of an eclipse.

The level of astronomical knowledge achieved in ancient Babylonia (southern Mesopotamia) cannot be separated from the astrological tradition that regarded eclipses as omens: Astronomy and astrology were then two sides of the same coin.

Rituals to preempt royal fate

According to Babylonian scholars, eclipses could foretell the death of the king. The conditions for an omen to be considered as such were not simple. For instance, according to a famous astronomical work known by its initial words, "Enūma Anu Enlil" – "When (the gods) Anu and Enlil" – if Jupiter was visible during the eclipse, the king was safe. Lunar eclipses seem to have been of particular concern for the well-being and survival of the king.

In order to preempt the monarch's fate, a mechanism was devised: the "substitute-king ritual," or "šar pūhi." There are over 30 mentions of this ritual in various letters from Assyria (northern Mesopotamia), dating to the first millennium B.C. Earlier references to a similar ritual have also been found in texts in Hittite, the Indo-European language for which we have the earliest written records, dating to second-millennium Anatolia – modern-day Turkey.

Saving the king

In this ritual, a person would be chosen to replace the king. He would be dressed like the king and placed on the throne. To avoid confusion with a real coronation, all this would occur alongside the recitation of the negative omen triggered by the observation of the eclipse.

The real king would keep a low profile and avoid being seen. If no additional negative portents were observed, the substitute king was put to death, therefore fulfilling the prophetic reading of the celestial omen while saving the life of the real king. This ritual would take place when an eclipse was observed or even predicted, something that became possible to do in later periods.

The presence of this ritual among the corpus of Hittite texts in second-millennium Anatolia has led to the assumption that it must have existed already in Mesopotamia during the first half of the second millennium B.C.

A legend

Although omens predicting the death of the king are already known for this earlier period, the truth is that the main basis for such an assumption is an interesting story preserved only in a much later, first-

millennium composition known by modern scholars as the "Chronicle of Early Kings."

According to this late chronicle, a king of the city of Isin (modern Iṣān Bahriyāt, about 125 miles to the southeast of Baghdad), Erra-imitti, was replaced by a gardener called Enlil-bani as part of a substitute-king ritual. Luckily for this gardener, the real king died while eating hot soup, so the gardener remained on the throne and became king for good.

The fact is that these two kings, Erra-imitti and Enlil-bani, did exist and reigned successively in Isin during the 19th century B.C. The story, however, as told in the late "Chronicle of Early Kings," bears all the trademarks of a legend. The story was probably devised to explain a dynastic switch, in which the royal office passed from one family or lineage to another, instead of following the usual father-son line of succession.

Looking for meaning in the skies

Mesopotamia was not unique in this regard. For instance, a chronicle of early China known as the "Bamboo Annals" (竹書紀年 Zhúshū Jinián) refers to a total lunar eclipse that took place in 1059 B.C., during the reign of the last king of the Shang dynasty. This eclipse was regarded as a sign by a vassal king, Wen of the Zhou dynasty, to challenge his Shang overlord. In the later account contained in the "Bamboo Annals," an eclipse would have triggered the political and military events that marked the transition from the Shang to the Zhou dynasty in ancient China. As in the case of the Babylonian "Chronicle of Early Kings," the "Bamboo Annals" are a history of earlier periods compiled at a later time. The "Bamboo Annals" were allegedly found in a tomb about A.D. 280, but they purport to date to the reign of the King Xiang of Wei, who died in 296 B.C.

The complexity of human events is rarely constrained and determined by one single factor. Nevertheless, whether in ancient Mesopotamia or in early China, eclipses and other omens provided contemporary justifications, or after-the-fact explanations, for an entangled set of variables that decided a specific course of history.

Even if they mix astronomy and astrology, or history with legend, humans have been preoccupied with the inescapable anomaly embodied by an eclipse for as long as they have looked at the sky.

The author is an Associate Professor of Classics & Ancient Mediterranean Studies, History, and Asian Studies at Penn State

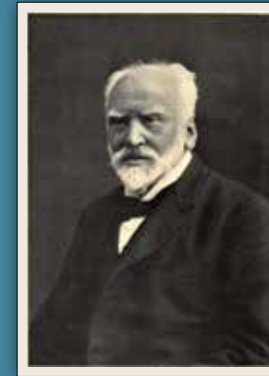
My Brother Is But One: The Brief Life of Hormizd d'Mar Shimun (1889-1915)

Part III of III

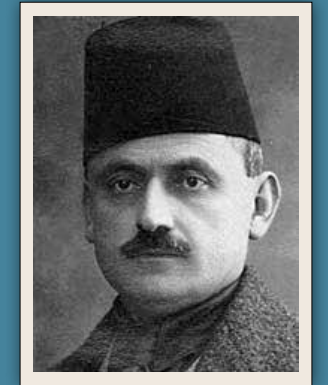
by Christopher R. Nelson, Mar Shimun Memorial Foundation



Constantinople (1915)



Sir Edwin Pears



Haydar Bey

PART III

When Turkey declared war on England on October 29th, 1914, forty-year Constantinople resident Sir Edwin Pears could still doubt any ill-will towards the English existed in the capital: "It was indeed my hope that I should be permitted to remain, and therefore when I saw the departure of the Ambassador and Consul and their staffs, and of nearly all of the British community who could afford to get away, it did not greatly alarm me. I knew that I had, as I trust I still have, many friends amongst the best Turks and among the Young Turkey Party now in power, and I fully recognised that the nation had been driving into war by the pushfulness and the persistency of the Germans, aided by Enver Pasha, the Minister of War."¹ Nevertheless, the Pera district where he and Hormizd resided had taken on the appearance of a "Prussian suburb" and their foreign neighbors were increasingly resentful towards the Germans and the Government they had co-opted. As French resident Emile Edwards noted: "The streets belong to the Germans, who govern as despots, and to the Young Turks their friends, these friends whom they will crush under their boots, if victory smiles on them on the Western battlefields."²

As for Hormizd, a semblance of security in being a student of Turkish still seemed possible. Caleb Gates remembers: "In view of the many conflicting reports circulating in the city and of the excitement produced by them, it might be expected that disturbances would break out among our students. They were of different nationalities; all the peoples engaged in the strife were represented among them; but, as in previous crises, no demonstrations were made in the College, and I can recall

no instance of strife between individual students. There was a different atmosphere in the College, and the boys seemed glad to lay aside national animosities which would have marred the peace of our campus."³

In the ensuing days however, newspapers (namely, the *İkdam*, a Turkish paper owned by the Germans) were publishing proclamations of jihad, or holy war, against Christian infidels. As instigated by Germany, Muslims under all Christian nations --especially the Allied powers-- were urged to revolt and try to overthrow them. German Ambassador Hans von Wangenheim (characterized by American diplomat Lewis Einstein as "cunning, and politically unscrupulous")⁴ nonchalantly rationalized to American Ambassador Morgenthau, "If we can stir the Mohammedans up against the English and Russians, we can force them to make peace."⁵ Though many dismissed this as base propaganda, a proclamation from the Sheik-ul-Islam describing a "... detailed plan of operations for the assassination and decimation of all Christians -- except those of German nationality,"⁶ enflamed an increasingly tense Constantinople such that, "In the latter part of November a wave of terror swept the city. Mobs sacked foreign shops, French schools and monasteries were closed, and orphans were turned into the streets."⁷

On November 30th, Sir Edwin was arrested. "The police entered my chambers, packed up the contents in sacks, including everything in my safe, and then proceeded to my house and made a similar seizure there. . . . I was taken across to Stambul [from Pera], to a building set aside as a prison for non-Turkish subjects. When I arrived there I was shewn into a room, requested to turn out my

pockets, and passed into the common room. I suppose it was about twenty feet long by thirteen broad. There were about five-and-twenty men in it--several Russians, three or four Frenchmen, and two or three Egyptians who had spoken approvingly of British rule. The room was filthy, and contained only one chair--an old one. The occupants were naturally interested in the new-comer, but treated me with great respect and even kindness, insisting that I should take possession of the chair. There I remained for two hours..."⁸

Friends called on Ambassador Morgenthau to whom Enver Pasha and Talaat Bey had assured that Pears would not be molested. Talaat called in the Minister of Police, Bedri Bey, to see what could be done, and only after some stern and forceful diplomacy by Morgenthau was Pears released that evening, thus not spending a single night in a Turkish prison. If only Hormizd had been so fortunate. His contacts with the English, and relation to the Patriarch of a "rebellious" Christian "infidel" people with three-quarters of a century of relations with missionaries and officials from Allied countries --not to mention recent religious discussions with the Russian Orthodox Church-- put him in the worst possible place at the worst possible time.

In early March of 1915, Surma Khanum received a letter from Hormizd. While the contents are unknown, this will be, it turns out, the last she hears from him. He might have described the hushed hopes of his neighbors that the British and French fleets gathered at the Dardanelles would take Constantinople, thereby linking the Allies with Russia in the East. Rumor was that, "... The chief of police was planning to sack and burn the city if the Allied fleets should succeed in forcing the Straits," according to Caleb Gates who was fielding requests from Turk and Christian alike to take refuge in the College should the Allies invade.⁹

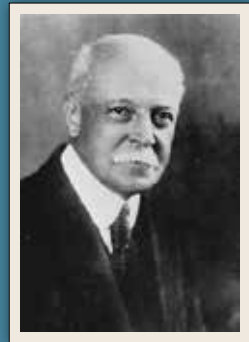
Hormizd probably wrote of the deserted shops and stores throughout Pera; the increased prices of food (his need

for money too, no doubt), and the virtual banishment of English and French on the streets, supplanted by German and Turkish voices, signs, and communiques of "conquest" and "victory". "In the streets one hears only the grating sound of windows, scraped of their foreign signs, for the tradesmen live in terror of the police, and obey every new regulation. The only exception made is in favor of German signs," noted Lewis Einstein.¹⁰ Hormizd would have witnessed with alarm the same "typical spectacle" described by the disaffected German war-correspondent Harry Stuermer, "... Of little bands of Armenians belonging to the capital being escorted through the streets of Pera by two gendarmes in their ragged murky grey uniforms with their typical brutal Anatolian faces, while a policeman who could read and write marched behind with a notebook in his hand, beckoning people at random out of the crowd with an imperious gesture, and if their papers showed them to be Armenians, simply herding them in with the rest and marching them off to the 'Karakol' of Galata-Serai, the chief police-station in Pera, where he delivered up his daily bag of Armenians."¹¹ As fresh streams of wounded soldiers filled the hospitals where some of his fellow students and teachers were volunteering, might Hormizd have informed his sister of having joined them in an attempt to stay in good graces? Possibly. Then again, the "rayas" (Ottoman Christian subjects), said Emile Edwards, prudently keep their fezzes on and, "... Do not mix with Europeans; they walk with a preoccupied air, and if there are several of them walking in company, they speak in monosyllables and do not deviate from commonplaces."¹²

Up to this moment the Assyrians of Hakkari had managed to remain ostensibly obedient to the Ottoman

1. Pears: 355.
2. Edwards: 90-1; 115 (November/December, 1914).
3. Gates: 214-15.
4. Lewis Einstein, *Inside Constantinople: A Diplomatist's Diary During the Dardanelles Expedition, April-September, 1915*. (London, John Murray 1917): 25.
5. Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*. (Garden City, Doubleday, Page & Co. 1926): 161.
6. Morgenthau: 163.
7. Gates: 212.

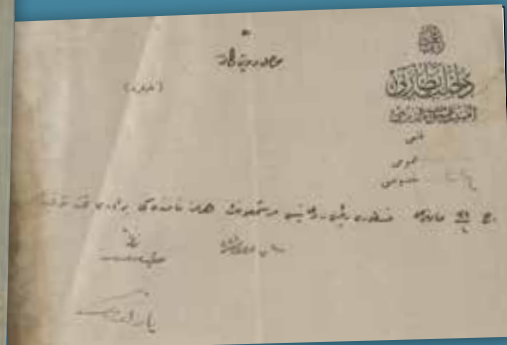
8. Pears: 358.
9. Gates: 214.
10. Einstein: 82 (1 June, 1915).
11. Harry Stuermer, *Two War Years in Constantinople*. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1917): 60.



Caleb Gates



Request for arrest of Hormizd
13 June, 1915



Confirmation of Hormizd's arrest - 20 June, 1915



State -- as attested by Sheikh Abdul-Kadir in his petition to the Minister of Education, and likewise corroborated by Surma Khanum and Shlemon Malik Ismail. But to an embittered and cynical Turkish official stuck in the remote and wild east like Haydar Bey, the Assyrian's "false fealty" consisted of little more than paying minimal taxes so as to "make themselves respected and forgiven." Forgiven, for all too frequently being unable to pay, because, as he was averse to admitting, the Assyrians (and Kurds) had long been victims of fraudulent tax-collecting schemes by unscrupulous Turkish officials in the region. In what almost passed for a death-bed confession (published in the year of his death in 1954) the septuagenarian ex-Ottoman Turk, disingenuously conceded: "While it is impossible for me to excuse and justify the Nestorian's rebellion, I cannot deny that we, through our inability or negligence, have actually helped those who forced them onto this path. We have neglected the East to such an extent, and left its people, including the Nestorians, to their own devices, that it is no wonder that this is the fate that has befallen them."¹² Even decades after the fact, Haydar is clearly less concerned about admitting to injustices perpetuated against Assyrians than about justifying his own prominent role in their expulsion; not to mention Hormizd's murder, about which, of course, he is mute.

Accounts of forced deportations, displacement, starvation, and atrocities committed against the Armenians and Assyrians in and around Urmia on the Persian border, were becoming frighteningly common. While Talaat Pasha personally re-assured Gates, Pears, and Morgenthau that the Government "... Did not want to get rid of the Armenians, for they needed them," in due time he, "... Threw off all disguise and avowed that they were determined to finish the deportations, which were then

about three-fourths completed. He gave three reasons for this policy: the Armenians had enriched themselves at the expense of the Turks; they had planned to set up a separate government; and they had turned against the Turks and were helping the Russians. . . . The policy seemed to be the scattering of Christians among the Moslem populations until one homogeneous Turkish nation should be formed."¹⁴

In the Hakkari, hostile Kurdish tribes were unfettered. Assyrian villages in Albaq, around Bashqala, were attacked as Turkish authorities looked the other way. In a move no doubt calculated to provoke the Assyrians into hostile resistance, the new pro-Young Turk Vali of Van, Cevdet Bey secretly ordered Mar Benyamin's arrest.¹⁵ So when the Assyrian leaders assembled with their patriarch between April 12th and 17th at Mar Diz, Mar Benyamin's calculus was clear: Assured destruction by the Turks or a chance of actual autonomy as promised by the Russians. Ever since 1911 rumors of Russian annexation of Azerbaijan had flitted in the air. After the depletion and demoralization of Turkish forces in the Balkans wars, this revolutionary prospect suddenly seemed possible. Was this not then the propitious moment for all Assyrians to break free from centuries of Turkish-Kurdish vassalage? Assyrian militias in Urmia had been organized and trained by Russian officers (with the consent of local Persian authorities) since the previous fall and the Commander-in-Chief of Russian Forces in Azerbaijan, General Chernazoboff confirmed that, "If the Assyrians take up arms against Khalil Pasha's army, they will greatly help us and we will recognize them as allies in perpetuity."¹⁶

With these assurances and in the face of an existential threat, "There was but one step for us to take," recalled Surma Khanum.¹⁷ Mar Benyamin and the tribal

heads thus concluded to forego the hopeless status quo of repression under the Turks that had existed for ten predecessor patriarchs buried in Mar Shalita and declared their will in a letter to the Vali of Van: They would defend themselves and fight alongside the Russians.

That same month thirteen Armenian servants from Robert College were imprisoned and never seen again. This was followed by the arrest and execution of over two-hundred notable Armenians on April 24th. Hormizd's day to day life grew more precarious as the academic sanctuary of the American college began to disintegrate: "The war had a dire effect upon living conditions in Turkey. Coal, charcoal, and oil were at prices which staggered even the well-to-do. Sugar, rice, flour, coffee, matches, and other staple supplies were sold at exorbitant rates. Many people around us were plunged into the deepest poverty," recalled Caleb Gates.¹⁸ The most serious shortage however was that of bread, in part, because the main bakers in the city had been Armenians. Meanwhile, the German Ambassador was threatening to have Robert College and every other American institution in Constantinople closed down should America enter the war against Turkey.

If Hormizd was scared and lonely amidst a chaotic Constantinople, now he was possibly starving too. Was escape back to Qudshanis even possible? Would Surma and the family still be there? Maybe Dr. Wigram could help, but where was he?¹⁹ . . . And Beatrice Neesan, was she safe in Urmia? Maybe she would change her mind about marriage should they come through this alive . . . Hormizd prayed. "Qaddisha allaha, qaddisha khailthana, qaddisha

la mayotha, ithrakham al ee. . ."²⁰ As he tried to

sleep a line from Professor Fikrit's poem simultaneously haunted and consoled him: "Surely this graveyard-existence will be followed by refulgent resurrection. . ."²¹ Fondly remembered by the Sisters at St.

Katharine's as "quaint, alert and full of life," Beatrice was in the throes of her own graveyard-existence in Urmia. A Sister at the French Mission reflected the anxious anticipation of the Urmijnaye in her diary on March 28: "Our days pass very sadly! one day we hope, and the next day all hope is lost... no sure news... the Russians are approaching, they say, then the rumor circulates that they won't come yet!"²² On April 4, an Assyrian resident named Shimon reports to a friend in London: "All Christian villages are looted and burnt. In twelve villages 1,000 men are killed, the rest are taking refuge in the American and French missions. Mar Dinkha [a bishop of Mar Benyamin's] they hanged on a tree; two other pastors were crucified and another was burned in Geogtapa Church. Girls from five years upwards have been violated, women abused everywhere."²³ The horror of it all so shocked Beatrice that shortly afterwards she died; of "fright," according to her father, and typhoid, according to a doctor.

On June 13th Haydar Bey telegraphs Talaat Pasha at the Directorate of Public Safety: "As previously reported, the tribes have started to arrive in Imadiye, and the Imadiye Qaimaqam has reported that clashes with the Tyari continue. Three months ago, Mar Shimun sent his family to Tyari, to be with Malek Ismael, while he himself went into the Diz tribe to carry out revolutionary plans

12. Edwards: 158-9 (March/April, 1915).

13. Haydar Hilmi (Vaner) Bey, "Turkiye de Nesturi Hadisesi." Yeni Tarih Dunyasi (The World of History), v. 16, 642. 30 April, 1954, Istanbul.

14. Gates: 216.

15. Surma: 71. Forged patriarchal letters by anti-Mar Shimun & pro-war elements likely contributed to this order.

16. RGVIA: 1082, op. 2, 81, 201-2; FO: 839/23 (14 May, 1915).

17. Op. cit.

18. Gates: 218.

19. Dr. Wigram had volunteered himself as the one "notable" of Bedri Bey's fifty English and French hostages to be symbolically deported to Gallipoli (in an attempt to stop the Allied bombing there) so as to help minister and console the others throughout the week-long ordeal. [Morgenthau: 248-9].

20. "Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon me. . ." Transl. fr. original Aramaic. Shimun, H.H. Mar Eshai. Liturgy of the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church of the East (Takhsa d-Raze), 1949: 23.

21. Tevfik Fikret Bey, "Haluk'un Inanci (Haluk's Credo), Haluk'un Defteri." 1911.

22. Annales (81): 258.

23. "Plight of the Nestorians in Persia," Manchester Guardian (London), 12 May, 1915: 12.



Talaat Pasha



and communicate with the Russians. He is now leading this operation. Mar Shimun has a brother studying at the Amerikan Mektebi'nde (American School) in Dersaadet (capital). The mentioned person is 18 years old [sic, 25-26], a boarder in Beyoğlu, tall, slim, dark-skinned, with black eyebrows. . . .” (With that profile every male youth in the district was conveniently eligible for deportation!) “Due to his loyalty, the Chaldean Patriarch's deputy, Father Toma Bajari,²⁴ knows and informs [us]. If the mentioned person is arrested, I will write a letter to Mar Shimun, telling him that I have detained his brother and that if he continues his betrayal, I will execute him. The decision to arrest the mentioned person is up to your discretion.”²⁵ If they couldn't capture Mar Benyamin himself, then the next best thing was his brother.

As this treacherous telegram tore across the wires from Mosul to Bab-i Ali, into the Interior Ministry, and onto Talaat's desk, Caleb Gates was sitting before him answering uncomfortable questions about the source of charity money being used to help Armenians and other Christian refugees in the city. Gates calmly explained that the College's Rumeli Hisar Charitable Society fund, “Gave milk to children and food to families, provided work for widows and medical care for the sick, making no discrimination, of course, between Christians and Moslems.”²⁶ The Interior Minister admonished that there was, “No objection to [your] helping the poor if [you] wished to do so, but that [we] could not allow subsidies from America,” before dismissing him. Talaat picked up the telegram and, apparently impressed by the Mosul governor's efficiently cold and cruel logic, had the reply Haydar was thirsting for telegraphed back to him by

June 20th: “The religious leader of the Nestorians, Mar Shimun's brother named Hormizd, has been arrested.”²⁷

“Then followed a deed as brutal and dastardly as it was characteristically Turkish,” recalled an anguished William Wigram, who desperately searched for but could not find his former pupil and friend. “[I] was in [Constantinople] at the time, and remember the fact of the sudden disappearance of the lad from his lodgings into the unknown Turkish prisons. Such disappearance was indeed no rarity just then, for men of all nationalities vanished in such a way and might or might not be heard of a month later in some place of internment in the interior of Asia. . . . In the case of Hormizd, the youth was detained for some time in the capital, though no efforts to find his actual place of detention were successful.”²⁸

The similarities with the arrest of Sir Edwin Pears seven months earlier (and who knows how many thousands in-between) certainly ended at the prison entrance. With no Ambassador Morgenthau to come to his rescue and Dr. Wigram unable to locate him, the fate of the promising student-turned-pawn was now in the clutches of the Young Turk war machine.

After being rebuffed by the Patriarch a frustrated Haydar Bey turned once more to the Interior Minister and insisted that having Hormizd in his own hands, in Mosul, was essential to bringing Mar Benyamin to his senses and the Assyrians to their knees: “. . . It is therefore imperative that he be dispatched immediately and the utmost care should be taken to prevent escape during transit.”²⁹

Talaat again obliged and had Hormizd served up to Haydar shortly after. If any further warnings or demands were forwarded to Mar Shimun they went unanswered,

for the patriarch had been away on two secret missions to and from the Persian border for arms and support from the Russians, as well as to coordinate the reception of a mass exodus of his people from the mountains.

On or about about September 13th --two and a half months after being imprisoned-- Haydar made good on his threats and had the honorable Hormizd d'Mar Shimun hanged in a public square in Mosul. At that moment Mar Benyamin was burying his youngest brother Eshaya who had fallen ill and died at Mar Audishu while the Turkish military were closing in on them. Shlemon Malik Ismail memorialized these events in his diary entry of September 22nd: “At that time, the Patriarch Mar Benyamin was suffering from three shocking fits of grief. First, not receiving any hope from the Russian government as was expected. Second, the loss of two of his princely brothers, Hormizd and Ishaya, in a span of ten days. Three, the destruction of all of his people at the hands of the Turkish government and the Kurdish Ashirets. With all this His Holiness never faltered from his trips to this side and that side of the community. Like a flying eagle with his maneuvers to all sides of the Ashirets, until he gathered all of his people under his wings, in the village of Qotranis. . . . Almost all Assyrian tribes followed the appeal to leave the country, since they realized the situation could not be militarily sustained without assistance. . . . The exact number cannot be determined. Perhaps 50,000 people were prepared to move out of their high mountain valleys in order to temporarily reach safety.”³⁰

Hope of Hormizd's survival lingered on for a time afterward in the heart and mind of his sister, for as late as April 14th, 1916, Surma Khanum responded to an English lady friend in London: “. . . You most kindly asked after Hormizd. I wish we knew his fate, dear boy; we have no news of him since the 5th of March, 1915. I asked Mrs.

Wigram if she would be able to tell us something of him by way of Dr. Wigram's letters; we are most anxiously looking forward to the answer. . . .”³¹

The sacrifice of Hormizd is symbolic of the innumerable tragedies suffered by Assyrian Christians as they valiantly strove for security, peace, and prosperity wherever they found themselves. Along with hundreds of thousands of Christians at that time he was the victim of a resurgent Turkish nationalism that systematically sought to sweep away all opposition, whether real or perceived. Hormizd embodied not only the Mar Shimun family's long tradition of faith, hospitality, and diplomacy, but also its spirit of leadership and education. His potential to reconcile diverse and disparate peoples sharing contested geographies persists in the personal and professional achievements of the descendants of those Assyrians whose ancestors fought, and found, brighter futures -- “desert islands of delight” -- for their children.

For more information about the Mar Shimun Patriarchal family lineage and history, or to order books on related topics, please visit marshimun.com.



24. Chaldean Patriarchal Vicar in Pera from 1909-1920. The revelation of his collusion in locating Hormizd reflects the historical discord between the Church of the East and their more government-friendly Catholic-Chaldean brethren, not least of which were well-documented intrigues of a malcontented faction of Catholic-convert cousins within the Patriarchal Family itself (possibly connected with Toma Bajari).

25. OA: DH.SFR.475/62 (Trans. Dr. Ramazan Turgut).26. Gates: 218.

27. OA: DH.SFR.54.81 (Trans. Dr. Ramazan Turgut).

28. LivChurch (64): 9.

29. OA: DH.SFR. 485.65 (24 August, 1915; Trans. Dr. Ramazan Turgut).

30. MalikIsmail: 57. These diaries are edited by his brother Yacu some years later. The mountain Assyrian refugees began arriving in Salmas, Iran at the end of September, 1915.

31. MarShimun: 143.

Trade and contraband in ancient Assyria

By Mathilde Touillon-Ricci, Collaborative Doctoral Award Researcher, Department of the Middle East

University of London, SOAS



Cuneiform writing takes its name from the wedge-shaped strokes impressed by the stylus on the soft clay, from Latin *cuneus* meaning 'wedge'.

Researcher Mathilde Touillon-Ricci takes us into the secret world of Assyrian smugglers and merchants, 4,000 years ago, and reveals some of their cunning plans to avoid paying taxes!

Trade and contraband in ancient Assyria

Whenever I am asked what I do for a living, I have to confess: I read people's private papers. In my defence, I have to say that any secrecy on these papers was lifted a few thousand years ago. These are not even made of paper but were shaped out of clay 4,000 years ago by travelling merchants along the roads of Mesopotamia and Anatolia.

Around 1900 BC, the kingdom of Kanesh and the city-state of Ashur, in modern-day Turkey and Iraq

respectively, enjoyed a deep and special partnership against a backdrop of trade agreements and the circulation of goods and people.

Out of sight, out of mind?

Old Assyrian merchants, as we call them, exported textiles and tin to Anatolia to be exchanged for silver, gold and copper. This was one of the first long-distance trading enterprises. To facilitate this trade, it was common for merchants to move from Ashur to Kanesh. There they settled more or less permanently in the lower town, forming what we could recognise as an expat community.

To sustain their long-distance activities, the merchants needed to communicate. 4,000 years ago, the most

efficient and fastest information sharing devices were inscribed tablets. Shaped out of clay by hand, tablets were impressed with a stylus while the clay was still soft. Once dried out, they were wrapped in a sheet of clay bearing the names of the sender and the addressee – in other words, an envelope.

Archaeologists have found 23,000 of these tablets, from a period of about 150 years. The many letters merchants sent and received offer us a glimpse of what life would have been like in those days. Having spent the last year studying these tablets, I have got to read some of their stories and it is always a thrill to sit down in the Museum's study room and to walk down memory lane, albeit further down than I usually would.

First person accounts

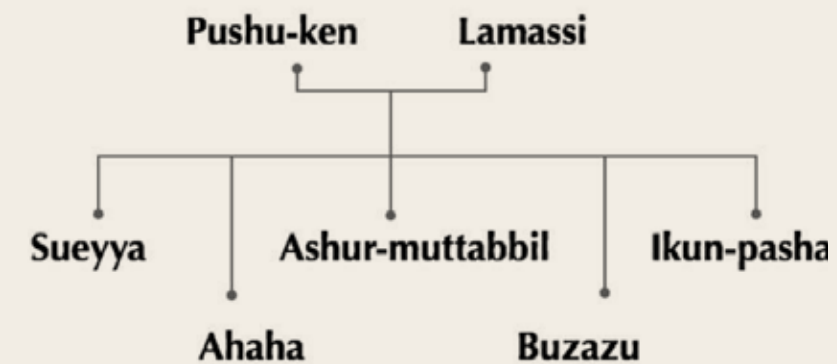
What I love most about Old Assyrian letters is their spontaneity. The introduction formula is kept to a

minimum, 'from so-and-so to so-and-so say this', then comes the message in the first person. The message typically contains instructions from one merchant to his trading partner about the forthcoming shipment: the types and quantities of goods, their unit price and the applicable exchange rates, practical arrangements for the caravan and its staff in terms of accommodation and subsistence, even including the fodder for the donkeys.

Sometimes, the message has a more peculiar substance. While reading a letter of instructions sent by Buzazu to his trading partners, I discovered that he said:

Let them [the transporters] bring the tin via the narrow track [smuggling route] if it is clear. If not, let them make small packets of my tin and introduce them gradually into Kanesh, concealed in their underwear.

In this letter Buzazu actually cancels the smuggling operation after the situation had changed and was no



Buzazu's family tree, reconstructed from the letters he sent and received.



A clay tablet inside its half-open envelope. Tablets were enclosed in a clay envelope to preserve the information they carried. Just like today, envelopes were usually discarded after being opened.



Buzazu cancels a smuggling operation, detailing how the goods would have been brought if the plan had happened.



Writing to his partners Pushu-ken and Rabi-Ashur, the merchant Kunilum instructs them to wait for cleared goods to return from the customs office so that they can be mixed and shipped together with undeclared goods in order to arouse less suspicion.



A letter about school from the young Sueyya to his father Pushu-ken.

longer favourable. Yet we are left wondering about the hows and whys of trade and contraband, not to mention the practicalities of concealing ingots of metal in one's underwear.

Rule makers and rule breakers

The agreement struck between Kanesh and Ashur regulated the activities of the trade in terms of authorised or prohibited goods as well as in terms of taxes to be applied to transactions. For example, iron – a rare and expensive metal costing up to 7 times the price of gold – and the lapis lazuli extracted from distant Afghanistan were sold under state monopoly.

Mirroring these regulations, a system of contraband was set up, either to avoid paying the relevant taxes or in order to trade restricted products. Thanks to the letters they wrote, we know of some of the taxes Old Assyrian merchants were supposed to pay: transport and import taxes upon arrival in Kanesh, tolls and duties on goods and persons en route and an export tax upon departure from Ashur.

Where there is a will there is a way, and for smugglers this was the 'narrow track'. Going through the mountainous paths of Anatolia, merchants got around some of the taxes by taking a detour away from authorised routes and checkpoints. Lacking the protection offered on official routes, the journey was more perilous, exposed to wild beasts, highway thieves and a harsh climate.

Smuggling also meant fooling the customs system either by not declaring taxable goods or by making a partial declaration. Along with the underwear trick elaborated by Buzazu, the merchants' letters describe various ruses, whether that meant paying off the guards or hiring mules among the locals who would have known the place inside out.



As lucrative as it may have been, smuggling was still illegal and convicted smugglers would have faced sanctions ranging from cash penalties to house arrest and jail. We know of the case of the merchant Pushu-ken, whose house was raided and found with smuggled goods, leading to a jail sentence for contraband. Despite the risks, merchants remained keen to smuggle, as we can read in Ishtar-pilah's plea to Pushu-ken:

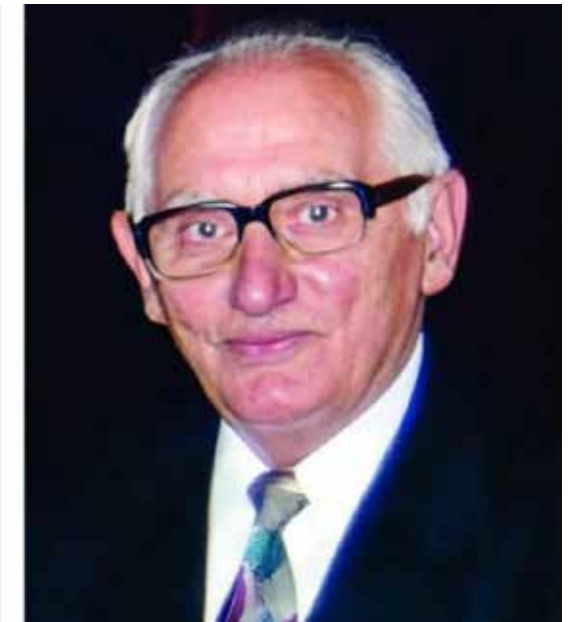
You are my colleague! Just as you send an order for your own goods to be smuggled, do also send one for my goods.

A family affair

Funnily enough, Pushu-ken happens to have been the father of Buzazu. Old Assyrian trade was a family business and we can still read the correspondence between Buzazu and his relatives: his mother Lamassi, his sister Ahaha, his brothers Sueyya, Ikun-pasha and Ashur-muttabbil.

Sueyya, the eldest son, grew up and went to school in Ashur while Pushu-ken had already settled a thousand miles away in Kanesh to oversee the activities of the family firm. One of the most touching letters was written by the young Sueyya to his father, boasting about his learning of cuneiform and demonstrating it with neat and careful writing.

The tablets written by Old Assyrian merchants are their private papers, recounting in the first person what they did, what they wish they had done and what they shall do, in life and business alike. So whenever I am asked what I do for a living, I say: I listen to people's accounts of their lives in their own words. I read the tablets they wrote 4,000 years ago, fascinated by the stories of the life they lived. And what a life they led!



Thirty years in the making: English-Assyrian dictionary

Compiling an English-Assyrian dictionary, Barutha, has been under way for 30 years. Unfortunately, its original author, Isho Barutha, passed away before its full completion. Now, the Barutha Assyrian Language Centre has announced the dictionary will be officially unveiled and launched on 17 April, 2024.

Aramaic Loanwords in Neo-Assyrian 911–612 B.C.

State Archives of Assyria Studies

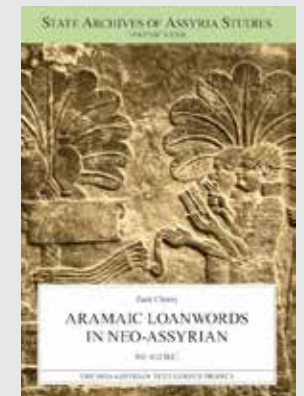
Paperback – July 25, 2023

by Zack Cherry (Author)

This study identifies and analyzes Aramaic loanwords occurring in Neo-Assyrian texts between 911 and 612 B.C. As two Semitic languages, Neo-Assyrian and Aramaic are sibling-descendants of a postulated common ancestor, Proto-Semitic. The work provides information about the contact between the two languages and about the people who spoke them.

To achieve this scholarly objective, a total of 9,057 Neo-Assyrian texts of different genres were utilized. The study discusses 166 proposed Aramaic loanwords in Neo-Assyrian, which are evaluated according to phonological, morphological, and semantic criteria. The findings demonstrate that only 69 words are confirmed loanwords, and 50 are possible loanwords. Additionally, 47 words are rejected as possible Aramaic loanwords in Neo-Assyrian. The majority of the confirmed loanwords are attested in letters and legal and administrative documents from the seventh century B.C., stemming from the major Assyrian cities of Nineveh, Assur, and Calah. Most of the confirmed loanwords are nouns.

Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Neo-Assyrian Empire from the mid-eighth century B.C. onwards, and the loanwords analyzed provide evidence for the use of Aramaic in Assyria proper as well. The relatively small number of certain and possible loanwords, however, fails to support the impression that Aramaic was widespread as a vernacular language in Assyria proper, especially towards the end of the period studied. The evidence also corroborates the conclusion, based on the extant prosopographical data, that the predominantly Assyrian character was maintained in Assyria proper until the very end of the Assyrian Empire.



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 Any donations received after 5/31/2024 will be included in the next issue of the Nineveh Magazine.
 Thank you for your generosity and support.

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Pietro Della Valle and Sitti Maani Gioerida:

The little-known story of love and adventure that joined East and West

By
Elizabeth Mickailly-Huber, Ph.D.



Portrait of Pietro Della Valle
by Gilliam van der Gouwen, 1669 - ca. 1740



Catafalque³ of Sitti of Sitti Maani Gioerida



Portrait of Sitti Maani Gioerida Della Valle
by Jan Lucasz van Hasselt

Pietro Della Valle was born into a wealthy noble family in Rome on April 2, 1586. He began his early life dedicated to literature and other scholarly pursuits. As a young man, he participated in a Spanish naval expedition against the Barbary States¹ in 1611. However, it was during a period of personal disappointment in love that he contemplated suicide. In his darkest moment, a Neapolitan professor of medicine by the name of Mario Schipano proposed traveling to the East as a remedy for his despondency.

Before embarking on his journey, Pietro made a solemn vow to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Leaving Venice in June 1614, he set out on his travels at the age of 28. His journey took him through exotic lands, including Constantinople, Alexandria, Cairo, and eventually to the Holy Land, where he arrived in March 1616, just in time for Easter celebrations in Jerusalem.

During his extensive travels in the Middle East, Pietro Della Valle encountered a portrait of Sitti Maani Gioerida, a beautiful Assyrian Christian. She was the daughter of an Assyrian Catholic father and an Armenian mother. Enchanted by her image,

Pietro traveled to Baghdad, where he married her only one month later. This passionate union marked the beginning of their remarkable, yet little-known, journey together.

Through their travels, Pietro made significant contributions to the world's knowledge. He provided descriptions of ancient Babylon, brought back cuneiform inscribed bricks from Nineveh and Ur, which were some of the first examples of cuneiform seen by Europeans. Their travels took them to Persia, where they were warmly received at the court of Shah Abbas. Pietro had a deep desire to establish a colony for Chaldean and Nestorian Christians to live in peace in Isfahan under the Shah's protection.

Sadly, tragedy struck during their journey when Sitti Maani fell ill with fever while waiting at Mīnāb² and their child was stillborn. Sitti Maani passed away shortly after, and Pietro had her body embalmed with camphor, intending to bury her in his family sepulcher at Rome. Despite the immense loss, Pietro Della Valle continued his journey, exploring India and finally returning to Europe. Upon his return to Rome, Pietro

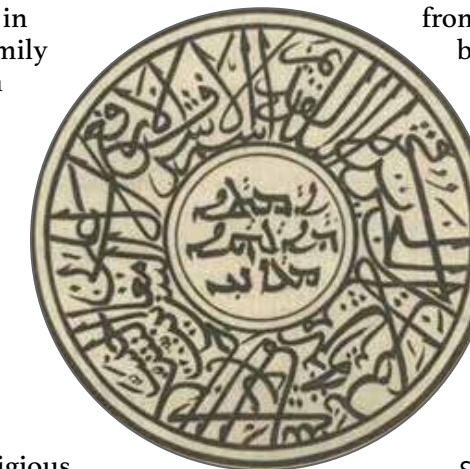
received honors and recognition, including from Pope Urban VIII.

Sitti Maani Gioerida's mummified remains were brought back to Rome in 1626 and placed in the Della Valle family vault at the church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli. A grand public funeral was organized in 1627, portraying Sitti Maani as a symbol of wifely virtue, an exotic and exemplary Eastern Christian, and a unifying figure between the East and West under Catholic patronage.

Sitti Maani's Assyrian Chaldean identity and multilingual abilities played a significant role in showcasing cultural diversity and religious reconciliation in Rome. The presence of seals and inscriptions in Syriac and Arabic script during her

funeral underscored her cultural heritage.

Eventually, Pietro married his second wife, Mariuccia (Tinatin de Ziba), a Georgian orphan from a noble family who had been adopted by his first wife, Sitti Maani, as a child. Mariuccia eventually became the mother of fourteen children. However, Pietro Della Valle's journey with his beloved first wife Sitti Maani Gioerida Della Valle, which was marked by love, passion, tragedy, and scholarly contributions, is a remarkable, yet obscure, chapter in the history of exploration and cultural exchange.



Syriac and Arabic Seal on the
tomb of Sitti Maani Gioerida in Rome

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3. A catafalque is a raised platform or structure used for holding a casket or coffin during a funeral or memorial service. It is often ornate and decorative, designed to honor and display the deceased during the funeral proceedings. Catafalques can vary in size and design, but they typically serve as a symbolic representation of the person who has passed away and are an important element of funeral ceremonies in many cultures.

1. The Barbary States, also known as the Barbary Coast, were a group of North African states along the Mediterranean coastline. They included: Algiers (Algeria), Tunis (Tunisia), Tripoli (Libya), Morocco (particularly the region of the Barbary Coast), and some parts of western Egypt. These states were known for their pirate activities, particularly in the 16th to 19th centuries. They conducted piracy and extortion in the Mediterranean Sea, capturing ships and holding sailors for ransom. The Barbary Pirates were infamous for their raids on European ships and coastal areas. The Barbary States' piracy activities led to conflicts with various European powers, including the United States, which resulted in the Barbary Wars (1801-1805 and 1815) fought by the U.S. against the Barbary States. These wars were aimed at ending piracy and protecting American merchant vessels from attacks in the Mediterranean.

2. Mīnāb, also spelled as Minab or Mināb, is a coastal town and port located in the Hormozgan Province of southern Iran. It is situated along the Persian Gulf coast, approximately south of the city of Bandar Abbas, which is the provincial capital of Hormozgan. Mināb is known for its proximity to the Persian Gulf and its importance as a port for trade and fishing activities in the region.

In Memory of Anna Tamrazi

Anna Tamrazi, aged 90, passed away peacefully in her home on May 27, 2024. She joins her beloved brother, Youra, and her cherished mother, Lideh, who passed before her. She leaves behind her loving niece, Anne.

Born in Abadan in 1933, Anna grew up in Iran and then attended the University of Beirut, where she received her Nursing Degree. Back home, she worked as a nurse, advancing in her career to manage a team of nurses, then transitioning into a Public Health administration role primarily concerned with the needs of women and children. She was an avid photographer, excelled at making well-tailored clothing, and enjoyed traveling throughout Europe. In 1970, Anna immigrated to the United States, where her brother lived in San Francisco. Not long after, she began working in Project Administration for Bechtel, where she continued for 27 years until her retirement.

Anna was an active member and dedicated supporter of the Assyrian Foundation of America and the Assyrian Church of the East in San Francisco. She attended services and volunteered regularly at the Church for many years, making dear friends in the Assyrian Community. An avid gardener, she would often take responsibility for all the floral arrangements and earn a reputation for being in charge of the coffee and tea at the Church functions. Although she was not there physically in recent years, her interest and support continued. Known as an elegant woman with a gentle nature and strong spirit, Anna acted with kindness and moral beliefs. She held high standards for herself and valued them in others — always respecting others, working conscientiously and efficiently, and consistently trying to find solutions to improve things. Her positive attitude and gracious demeanor made her beloved, and to anyone who knew her, she will always be considered a truly good woman, a great lady.

Anna's brother and best friend was Youra Tamraz, who died suddenly in 1985. He was a warm and vibrant man who dedicated himself to promoting the Assyrian heritage and improving the Assyrian community. Youra was an energetic leader in the Assyrian Foundation and the Church of the East, writing prolifically for speaking occasions, articles, and a weekly radio program. His thoughts about Assyrian politics and culture were inspiring to those around him. Along with his kind and lively nature, his loss is still felt today. Their mother, Lideh, was also an active and beloved figure within the community. She immigrated to the US in the mid-70s and lived with Anna. Lideh was an outgoing, brilliant woman who was a mother, mentor, and friend to her children and many others who knew her. Her warm nature and spirit of integrity were tremendous gifts passed on to Anna and Youra, and her loving ways embraced the whole community.

It is with joy and peace that Anna is reunited with her brother and mother in eternal spirit.



Youra Tamrazi

In Memory of Shlimon Tamraz

By Ninef Alkhas

On the evening of 3/31/2024, Shlimon Tamraz passed away peacefully in his hometown of Copenhagen, Denmark. Shimon was a man who epitomized the joy of living and the thrill of exploration. His passion for life was infectious, and his love for travel was boundless. As we mourn his passing, we find solace in remembering the light he brought into our lives.

He was a completely unique person and had a great impact on all the people he met. He could talk, accommodate everyone, and express his opinion without offending anyone. Whether it was at his workplace or in the trade union, where he was a very committed member, or his service for the Danish Social Democratic Party, he was revered and respected in all aspects of his life.

For all of us, especially his nieces and nephews, Shlimon was more than just an uncle; he was a guiding force, a source of unwavering support, and a fountain of wisdom. His laughter resonated in our hearts, and his love enveloped us, making us feel cherished and valued.

The void left by Shlimon's departure is immeasurable, and it is further deepened by the loss of his beloved brother Andre, who left us earlier this year. Their bond was not just unbreakable but palpable, filling our lives with love and laughter. Together, they were a source of joy and comfort, earning them the endearing title "The Twins".



While Shlimon and Andre may no longer be physically present, their love remains a constant in our hearts, providing solace in our darkest moments. We carry their memories with us, treasuring every shared moment and every lesson learned, knowing that their love will forever be a part of us.

As we bid farewell to Shlimon, let us take solace in the love he bestowed upon us and the indelible mark he left on our lives. Though he may be gone, his spirit lives on in the countless lives they touched. Rest in peace.

Shlimon and Andre Tamraz





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