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DECEMBER 2023

As 2023 nears its end, and the new year hides around the corner, we look back with gratitude, knowing now more than ever that each new year of life is a gift which should be cherished. This feeling of gratefulness, in turn, reminds us of just how precious a gift is to those who are in need.



Year in and year out, the Assyrian Foundation of America (AFA) uses your generous donations to bring joy and assistance to Assyrians in need and those working to preserve our unique heritage. Below is a brief summary of the many worthy projects that AFA supported this year:

- \$50,000 in donations to support our people in need:
 - Syria and Turkey earthquake victims
 - Lighting project in the village of Armoota, Iraq
 - Needy Assyrians in Armenia
 - Iraqi Christian Relief Center
- \$45,000 total in scholarships (supporting Assyrian students pursuing advanced degrees in the field of Assyrian studies), and grants (supporting cultural programs and Assyrian media)
 - "Road to Urmi" movie - Frank Gilbert Production
 - Etuti – Assyrian Students in Armenia
 - Esther Elia Pottery & Art, a cultural exchange between indigenous groups sharing pottery techniques
 - Tomas Isik Book Translation
 - "Kekhwa Project" – Assyrian Digital Library
 - Shamiran Media
- \$35,000 to the Assyrian Studies Association (ASA) who are working tirelessly to raise awareness and preserve the Assyrian history, language, and heritage.

Since 1964, the Assyrian Foundation of America has remained steadfast in its commitment to preserving Assyrian language, culture, heritage and history through educational endowment, humanitarian contributions, and cultural promotion. Yet, none of these endeavors would be possible without the support of our cherished members and friends.

We ask for your continued support this year so that, together, we can continue to preserve our beautiful Assyrian culture, language, and heritage. You can donate online www.assyrianfoundation.org OR use the enclosed envelope!

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Blessed New Year

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

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2023 Assyrian Studies Symposium: Formative History, Challenges, and New Directions



Left to Right: Dr. Michel Shamoon-Pour and Dr. Sargon Donabed.



Left: Mikhael Benjamin.



Left: Dr. Nahrain Kambar.



Alexandra Lazar

The Assyrian Studies Association (ASA), in collaboration with Stanford University's Humanities Center, hosted the first Assyrian Studies Symposium from August 11th to 13th, 2023 at Stanford University. The Symposium served as a prominent platform where scholars, experts, and community members gathered to explore and celebrate the diverse aspects of Assyrian history, culture, and heritage. This year's Symposium, held under the theme of Formative History, Challenges, and New Directions, aimed to delve deep into the emerging Assyrian Studies field.

The objective of the Symposium was to unravel the intricacies of the Assyrian civilization's formative history, understand the contemporary challenges faced by the Assyrian people, and chart new directions for future research and scholarship in the field. It served as an educational and networking hub, where attendees and presenters connected and gained insights into various aspects of the Assyrian Studies field, such as language, literature, history, archaeology, politics, and more.

"The Symposium was an excellent opportunity to meet scholars and researchers from across the disciplines and worldwide. Thanks to this event, I met several Assyrian scholars from Iraq and Europe for the first time, and I hope that the connections that I made at Stanford lead to collaborative projects in the near future. The Stanford Symposium was also a great way to meet many members of our communities from across the country, especially from the Bay Area," said Dr. Michel Shamoon-Pour, Assistant Research Professor from Binghamton University and Board Member at the Assyrian Studies Association.

The Symposium boasted a diverse range of in-person and online presenters who shared their research and unique perspectives on the new field of Assyrian Studies. The event brought together eighteen presenters, and their insights shed light on the multifaceted nature of the Assyrian Studies field. Moreover, the presenters contributed to a wide array of discussions, covering topics that ranged from Assyrian history, political science, and linguistics to contemporary Assyrian diaspora communities and their challenges.

The Symposium featured the following presenters: Esther Elia (University of New Mexico), Daniel Tower (University of Sydney), Basic Jacobs (Immigrants Working Centre Organization), Julye Bidmead (Chapman University), Eve Sada (Harvard University), Joseph Hermiz (University of Chicago), Michel Shamoon-Pour (Binghamton University), Nahrain Bet Youndadam (The University of Arizona), Alexandra Lazar (University of California, Davis), Sargon Donabed (Roger Williams University), Abdulmesih BarAbraham

(More Afrem Foundation), Lawrence Nader Makho (University of Zakho), Efrem Yildiz (University of Salamanca), Mikhael Benjamin (Nineveh Center for Minority Rights), Arbella Bet-Shlimon (University of Washington), Mark Tomass (Harvard University), Nashie Shamoon (Victoria University of Wellington), Ruth Kambar (New York University), Mary Isaac (University of California, Irvine), Annie Ellis (Assyrian Foundation of America).

"As a non-Assyrian who studies ancient Assyrian culture, attending and presenting at the ASA Formative History, Challenges, and New Directions Symposium was an enlightening and edifying experience. Listening to and learning from a wide diversity of Assyrian scholars, artists, and community leaders, I am even more motivated to continue to forge the vital connections between the past and present and work to preserve the future of Assyrian Studies. I am honored to be welcomed into the Assyrian community and look forward to the next Symposium!" said Dr. Julye Bidmead, Associate Professor, Director, Center for Undergraduate Excellence at Chapman University and Advisory Board Member at the Assyrian Studies Association.

The Symposium attracted attendees from across the United States, including California, Arizona, Texas, Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, and beyond, showcasing its testament to the widespread interest in Assyrian culture and heritage, as well as the significance of the research and discussions held during the event. Moreover, the online participation of scholars from Iraq, Spain, New Zealand, and other parts of the world highlighted the global reach of the Symposium. In addition to the academic presentations, the Symposium held an Assyrian Prayer Bowl Archive art showcase with the artist Esther Elias and hosted a cocktail reception sponsored by Lamassu Arak and Miner Family Wines.

The 2023 Assyrian Studies Symposium was an opportunity for all those interested in Assyrian Studies to gain a deeper understanding of this rich cultural heritage. The event not only celebrated the history of the Assyrian people but also shed light on the contemporary challenges they face and the promising new directions in the field. The gathering underscored the importance of preserving and promoting the Assyrian heritage while offering a platform for scholars and enthusiasts to collaborate and exchange ideas. The Symposium stands as a beacon for the enduring study and appreciation of the Assyrian culture and its invaluable contributions to human history. The next Symposium is to take place in 2025.



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

(Part I of III)

by Christopher R. Nelson, Mar Shimun Memorial Foundation



Surma Khanum, Mar Yosip Sargis, Mar Benyamin, Hormizd d'Mar Shimun, Eshai d'Mar Shimun, and unknown girl.

Patriarchal house, Qudshanis, 1894
[Source: Hermann Burchardt (Burchardt Collection, Ethnology Museum, Berlin)]

PART I

On July 10th, 1915, while convening with Assyrian tribal leaders in the Tal district of the Hakkari, the Patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Benyamin Shimun, opened a message from Haydar Bey, the Turkish Vali (governor) of Mosul district and began reading: “*All of Tyari is destroyed and the fighting continues . . .*” The twenty-eight-year-old patriarch upon whose shoulders rested over 125,000¹ of the millet’s² (nation’s) renewed hopes after seemingly interminable impoverishment and oppression, gazed heavenward and cried, “*Ya Allaha hiyiran!*” (“*Oh God, help us!*”).

Haydar Bey was the former governor of Diza district and recognized by Mar Benyamin for having kept hostile Kurdish tribes in check. Times had changed and now the Assyrians were seen as “*sedition rebels*” to the nationalist Young Turk government. Repression and murders of Assyrian villagers were rapidly rising. Three months earlier, Mar Benyamin had gathered the heads of the Assyrian *ashirets*³ and after a debate lasting five days decided to sever political relations with the Ottoman government. This meant declaring war on Turkey and joining the Entente.⁴ Meanwhile, as one military operation after another to suppress the mountain Assyrians had been valiantly repulsed, Haydar Bey had grown increasingly agitated and desperate. Most concerning to his superiors were the recent defeats in the Caucasus by Russian forces who threatened to capture the city of Erzurum, thus bringing the Russian Empire closer to Constantinople.⁵

Mar Benyamin stared into the sombre countenances of the gathered *Maliks* (chiefs) of the six major *ashiret* districts (Tyari, Tkhuma, Jilu, Baz, Ishtazin, & Dizan) while addressing Haydar’s sinister postscript directly to them: “*May I tell you that your brother Hormizd is in our hands in Constantinople. If you do not capitulate with all your tribes, your brother will be killed.*”

Whether it was minutes, hours, or days later, Mar Benyamin’s recalcitrant response to Haydar Bey, and thereby, the Sublime Porte,⁶ would become legendary amongst Assyrians. According to his brother-in-law Shlemon Malik Ismail (wedded to sister Romi) who was present at this gathering, the Patriarch

replied: “*Under no circumstances will I submit the tribes to your power, after having experienced what the Turkish government has done to the Assyrian Christians with oppression and torture. For this reason I prefer to let my brother be killed than to surrender the entire people.*”⁷

Anglican missionary William Aigner Wigram, who had lived and worked amongst the Assyrians since the early 1900s --for several years as Hormizd’s teacher-- explained to readers of The Living Church magazine back in England: “*Everyone who had knowledge of the family life of the patriarchal family knows how singularly close were the ties that united the two brothers; those then can appreciate to the full the heroism of the reply that went back from the Patriarch, breathing in every syllable the thought that his family held its position on condition of living, and if need be dying, for the nation. ‘My people are my charge,’ said the Patriarch, ‘and they are many. My brother is one. He must do what I would do if my duty lay that way, and give his life for his people.’*”⁸

His sister, Surma Khanum, who religiously recorded the patriarch’s day-to-day life in her private diaries documented a third, and plausibly more verbatim version of Mar Benyamin’s telegraphic response: “*My people are my sons, and they are many. Hormizd my brother is but one. Let him therefore give his life for the nation.*”⁹

This bald attempt at blackmail must rank as one of the most wretched decisions faced by any national leader throughout history. Though the patriarch’s response and subsequent acts of bravery in the World War are well known to Assyrians, little has been said about the young man himself who was sacrificed. By piecing together scattered anecdotes from English missionaries along with references in the diaries of Surma Khanum and Shlemon Malik Ismail, and the addition of newly translated documents from Ottoman and Russian archives, a more complete portrait of this beloved son of the Patriarchal Family and Assyrian nation can finally be brought to light.

Hormizd d’Mar Shimun was born in 1889 in the Patriarchal See of Qudshanis to Asiat and Ishai d’Mar Shimun, the fourth child after Surma Khanum (born in 1883), Romi (b.

1885), and Benyamin (b. 1887). Ishai and Asiat were busy bees, for Dawid (b. 1890), the twins Zaya and Poulos (b. 1893), and Eshaya (b. 1895) followed soon after.

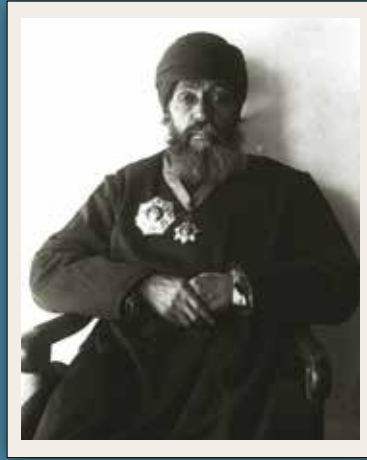
The remote mountain village of Qudshanis in which he was born had been the patriarchal see for nearly three centuries, and Assyrian (Church of the East) Christians and Muslim (mostly Sunni) Kurds had cohabitated the Hakkari region of Turkey’s Eastern Anatolia for several centuries before that. Though the Kurds far outnumbered the Assyrians and regularly subjected them to a state of serfdom both peoples had been independent of Ottoman authority for most of their collective history. By the time Hormizd was born English missionaries were established in the region and one, William Henry Browne, had resided in the patriarchal village for several years. Browne, first and foremost, was a religious representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Anglican Church. But he also played a vital role as village apothecary and liaison between the British Government and the region’s consuls, preventing an impending massacre on at least one notable occasion. He was also a private tutor to the Patriarch Mar Rowil’s niece, Surma Khanum, and his nephews.

Hormizd’s earliest memories would have included roaming the mountain village with his older brother Benyamin and his cousins, playing pranks alongside the patriarch’s aging jester Shlimun, shooting slings at things they ought not to, hunting partridges and snakes (possibly bears and larger game with his father), swinging on the swing set up at Browne’s house, and assisting his mother and aunts with daily household chores. Every week would end (and begin) with a climb up the rickety wooden ladder onto the outdoor terrace of Mar Shalita church, before ducking down and descending into the dim and spartan hearth of the fortress-like chapel to attend services with friends and fellow villagers to pray, sing, and listen to his uncle, Mar Rowil recite *raza* (liturgy) and offer *qurbana* (eucharist).

Qudshanis, despite being small, remote and difficult to access, was ironically one of the busiest villages in the region. Thousands of visitors came and went throughout the year. It was widely acknowledged that, “*There being no hotels in the East, the Patriarchal house was the largest guest house in Kurdistan.*”¹⁰ Surma once tallied 9,704 guests -- as of early spring!¹¹ This

steady stream of visitors came from far and wide to meet the Patriarch to “*interview*” over essential issues, lodge complaints, pay taxes, settle disputes, arrange marriages, call for the consecration of buildings and bishops, forge alliances, or rest on the way to somewhere else. Throughout Hormizd’s childhood he would have regularly seen maliks of the Assyrian tribes, as well as Turkish government officials, Kurdish tribal representatives, foreign consuls, missionaries and independent travelers from each of the world’s great powers: England, America, France, Russia, and Germany. As simple, rustic and poor as the people appeared to outsiders, in actuality, the *Qudshishnaye* encountered more of the world on their remote mountain-top on a weekly basis than the majority of countrified Americans or Europeans in their lifetimes.

Presiding over this “*global*” guest-house and all its affairs was Hormizd’s aunt Sulte (Mar Rowil’s sister), his mother Asiat, and sister Surma Khanum. Every visitor would have been welcomed by one of these three and treated most hospitably, regardless of religious denomination, nationality, tribal or political affiliation. In the summer of Hormizd’s fifth year two foreign guests took some of the very earliest photographs we have of the Mar Shimun family, Mar Shalita church, and the village. Within a year of these images Hormizd’s father Ishai would die of typhoid fever while visiting Urmia. As Mar Rowil’s half-brother and trusted advisor, he was respected throughout the Assyrian community and beyond. His funeral procession in Urmia attracted large crowds and included a military marching band usually reserved for Persian nobility. “*Such a grand mix you never saw,*” recalled Katharine Cochran, wife of American missionary Dr. Joseph Cochran (who could not cure Ishai). “*High Church (Anglican), Old Church (Nestorian), and New Church (Evangelical), but in one way it was pleasant; all seemed to have a national feeling aroused and forgot for the moment the differences of sect.*”¹² Two years later in late 1897 we catch another fleeting glimpse of Hormizd as a now fatherless eight-year-old boy when English traveler Earl Percy visits. He wrote of his first moments upon entering Qudshanis: “*The whole Nestorian community had turned out to meet us and kiss our hands, headed by Mar Auraham, cousin of Mar Shimun, with Benjamin the little patriarch-designate and his brother. A strange group they made, with their fair complexions and blue eyes [sic],*



Mar Rowil Shimun XX (Jul. 1894)
[Source: Hermann Burchardt]



Mar Shimun Family,
Qudshanis (summer 1894)
[Source: Bedros Yeghiayian
collection, London. Courtesy of
Jean-Pierre/Chabouh
Kibarian at houshamadyan.org]



Mar Shalita Church, Qudshanis (Nov. 1897) [Source: Earl Percy
(Collection of the Duke of Northumberland, Alnwick Castle, U.K.)]



Qudshanis (Nov. 1897) [Source: Earl Percy]

their raven hair falling over bare broad chests in long plaits from under the tall conical hats of white and black felt." Two days later he remarked: "The whole household is still plunged in grief at Ishai's death who seems to have been a fascinating person."¹³

When Mar Rowil died in 1903, Hormizd's older brother Benyamin became the next patriarch at age sixteen. From that moment life for Hormizd and his siblings became one of early adulthood. Lifelong commitment to ecclesiastical duties, management of the affairs of the nation, diplomacy, and, as fate would have it, military leadership had been assumed by a Mar Shimun since 1318.¹⁴

Between 1906 and 1908 Hormizd attended the newly built mission school in the town of Van, "four fairly hard marches"¹⁵ north of Qudshanis. In November of 1907 Anglican missionary W.S. Bowdon writes: "A little before this [winter], the Russian Consul, who had been journeying in the mountains, not knowing of the outbreak of fever [scarlet fever], had brought the Patriarch's sister, Surma, and her brother, Hormizd, a lad of [seventeen or eighteen] years, back with him to be his guests in Van. On my arrival I found that his household had not escaped, but that all three of his children were ill. I at once took Hormizd away for greater safety to the Mission House, where he commenced to read regularly with me. So another month passed and still the fever raged . . . Hormizd, who had escaped infection, was to remain and read with me in Van. His sister had already returned home. This is the first year the Patriarch has consented to his brothers reading with us. We were very glad to have them. Hormizd here, and his three younger brothers at Qudshanis, have all been reading steadily, and we hope they will be able to come to Van and take good places in our school next year."¹⁶

On October 25, 1908 Wigram, then teaching in Van, was impressed enough to report back to the Archbishop that Hormizd, now aged nineteen, ". . . Is a promising young lad. Already he has shown himself capable of being a useful helper to his brother, in some diplomatic negotiations with a Kurdish chief ('a kingdom trusted to a schoolboy's care' in very truth!), and he is very loyal to Mar Shimun. Also, we may state that he has a full share of the family inheritance of good looks. . . ." ¹⁷

And elsewhere: "One person who has shown himself both an eager and very efficient 'walker in villages' is Hormizd, brother of Mar Shimun, who is still at the school, and it has been a very great pleasure to the Missionaries, and to the senior teachers, to see this young fellow rise to his position and responsibilities as one of the hereditary chiefs of his 'melet.' . . ." ¹⁸ The reference to his being a "chief" of course is meant figuratively since Hormizd held no rank beyond that of being a member of the Patriarchal family. But as Wigram points out (in typical colonialistic tones) to his fellow Anglicans back in London: "The anomalous position of the family of the patriarch in the church (their sanctity is second only to that of patriarch), has its distinct uses, in providing what the oriental most needs; leaders whose right to lead cannot be challenged."¹⁹

This period marks the beginning of Hormizd's work on behalf of his brother-patriarch and the Assyrian people. Like his father and grandfather before him he was sent out to assist in collecting annual taxes, a requirement imposed on the Patriarch by the Sublime Porte since the mid-19th century, and more strictly enforced in recent years. But, as recorded by missionaries who knew him, Hormizd was far more than a tax collector. In early 1909, for example, he accompanied George S. Reed on a village tour near Urmia, inspecting churches and schools.²⁰

May 3: "Hormizd, the second brother of the Patriarch and I left for Urmia. On the second day, we reached the Gawar Plain, and stayed a day, in order that I might examine the six village schools."

May 6: "Stayed the night in Iyal, at the house of the late Sh. Qambar; grandfather of the Patriarch [Hormizd's maternal grandfather]; and, in the morning, having visited the schools, went down to Pagi and Mar Bhishu. All the schools in these villages seem to be carefully taught, the Catechism in Mar Bhishu and Iyal being worthy of special note."

May 7: "We reached Mawana at sundown. The men had heard of our coming, and turned out in strong force to kiss the hand of Hormizd and escort him to the village."

May 8: "When the whole population of Anhar had welcomed

Hormizd, we started for the city, but our progress was slow, as newcomers continued to meet us, and the people of Alwach (including the Russian bishop, Mar Sorishu), Senger, and Charbash, all demanded that the procession should stop while they paid their respects to the Patriarch's representative. Near Senger a company of 30 or so Balulan men greeted him with lusty cheers, and accompanied us into the city, firing deafening salutes at intervals. This is said to be the most enthusiastic welcome on record given to any member of the Patriarchal house."

Awaiting the pair and their retinue in Urmia, missionary F.J. Blamire Brown recalled that, "On May 8th, a pencilled note came in from Mr. Reed saying that he and Hormizd, the brother of Mar Shimun, had arrived at a village some six hours off and would arrive with us on that day. We busied ourselves with preparations to go and meet them, and managed to get a carriage which took us out to Anhar. News had soon spread in Urmia of the coming of the Patriarch's brother, and we were accompanied by other vehicles and horsemen to Anhar. We had not been there ten minutes before Mr. Reed and Hormizd arrived. It was good to see an Englishman and colleague again, and those who knew or have heard of Hormizd, a fine young fellow of nineteen, will know what a welcome visitor he would be. There was no doubt what the Urmijnaye thought about it, for each village en route turned out in force to kiss the hand of a member of Mar Shimun's house, and more and more people kept arriving from the city on foot or horseback to welcome him. The pace back was reduced to a walk owing to the throngs on the road, and it was a fine sight to see several score of horsemen galloping round and round in Persian fashion, with guns banging on all sides. At Alwach there was even the aged Mar Sorishu, the Russian Bishop, protesting his devotion to the Patriarchal house. And so in royal style, headed by an escort of Turkish cavalry from the Turkish consulate and surrounded by a huge crowd, the city was entered, and we entered our yard to find it filled with another crowd; there followed a reception in the diwankhana, and every day since there have been many callers, and Hormizd with the Archdeacon have been working hard in returning them."²¹

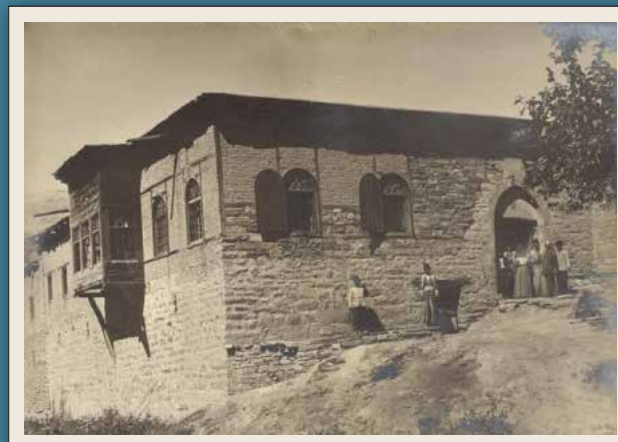
However much he was flattered by such a spectacular reception, Hormizd might have remembered those glorious days for another reason. It seems that on this visit he

first met Beatrice (b. 1888), daughter of the Assyrian Anglican missionary Yaroo M. Neesan. She had recently returned to her family after six years of boarding school in England and was now superintending her own girls' school and helping her father with the mission work. At some point shortly afterwards Hormizd and Beatrice are promised to one another. Again, in early fall of the same year, Wigram testifies to Hormizd's further work on behalf of Patriarch and people: "After the consecration of Khinu Church, the Bishop [Mar Yabhalaha], with Hormizd and 'the Apostle,' [missionary] paid a round of visits among the Syrian villages of Van district. It was harvest time, and at every village capfuls of corn were brought to the Bishop, with prayer that he would deign to bless 'seed, crop, and threshing floor,' which he invariably did with great dignity. . . ." ("Now we shall prosper, now our crops will be good, and our flocks and herds will increase, for the brother of Mar Shimun has come to bring us a blessing," was the greeting given him in one village, that of Ermanis.") . . . One small incident may be mentioned for the hopefulness of it. The village of Ermanis, which is mixed Syrian and Kurdish, has a dispute with their neighbours of Khinu, the one asserting, the other denying, a right to drive sheep over the ground of their neighbour, in order that, as certain times of the year, the sheep may drink the salt waters of the lake on which Khinu looks. Ermanis, lying in an elevated basin, possesses no salt-lick. The Mussalmans of this village not only agreed (at the prayer of the village deacon, be it said to his credit) to refrain from going to law with the men of Khinu, but also fully agreed to submit to the decision of 'Mar Shimun's brother,' if he would act as Umpire. This is not only a high compliment to the character of this youth, but is a sign of the times. People who know their Ottoman empire well have often said, 'when you can get a Turk to obey a rayat, we may begin to believe in reform.' In this case Kurds voluntarily submitted an important decision to the impartiality of a Christian youth. It is a most hopeful sign. . . ." ²²

Hormizd's adjudication was also called for on contentious pecuniary arguments such as the distribution of proceeds from the purchase of winter firewood: ". . . Just now, the question that is vexing the souls of purchaser and vendor, both is, who is to have the purchase-money? It is not fair that all should go to the present Qasha (priest), for the trees were not his personally, and the matter has been referred to the judgment of



Hormizd (center)- 19 years old, at Van Deacon's School (1907-8)
[Source: Heazell, F.N. *Kurds & Christians*, Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., London 1913: 177]



Patriarchal House (1910)
[Source: H. Malakhyan. Lalayan, Ervand. *Vasporakani Asoriner [The Assyrians of Vasporakan]*. *Azagrakan Hande [Ethnographic Review]*, XXIV (1913): 215



Hormizd, Surma Khanum and villagers in front of Mar Shalita Church (Jun. 1910)
[Source: J.H. Bill, *Wide World Magazine* (28) No. 167, Mar. 1912: p. 472]



Hormizd (Jun. 1910)

Hormizd and the greybeards of the village."²³

When Wigram and Hormizd stopped to rest at one of the Yezidi villages in the Van district that same fall, the *reis* (chief) of the village and a delegation of elders got word of their presence. As Wigram tells it: "They came to declare that we must come to the house and 'eat bread.' The brother of Ali Beg, the head of all Yezidis, was in the village, for he too, as it appeared, was making a tour among the out-liers of his nation, and the Brother of Mar Shimun must come and call on him. Much politeness was exchanged during the two-and-a-half hours that our formal call lasted, for of course an elaborate meal had to be cooked, to show proper politeness to the visitors. . . ." ²⁴ And, "In Zel, which is hidden away in the recesses of the Chokh range of mountains, 'Had you not come, Kesi (term of respect), we should have turned Chaldean, or perhaps Protestant; we have been left alone by our Patriarch for so long, and we thought that he had quite forgotten us. Now we know that Mar Shimun cares."²⁵

At the end of his village tour with Hormizd, Wigram reported to the Archbishop of Canterbury: ". . . There are real signs of a spirit of self-help and independence among the Syrian villagers. . . . Rebuilding of the church at Khinu, and Serai is now declaring that it will build a school for itself instead of using a room in somebody's house, and will maintain its own teacher, at least in great part. The *Qaimaqam* (sub-district governor) has declared that in that case, he has the authority to make them a small grant in aid from their own taxes, if the teacher can teach Turkish fairly well. There is one necessity, however -- a manager of the building works. True to their quarrelsome nature, the villagers cannot agree to work under one of themselves, but there must be a *tegarana* (leader) from without. Fortunately, we hope to provide one in the person of Hormizd, brother of Mar Shimun."²⁶

In the summer of 1910, the British consul of Shiraz in Iran, J.H. Bill, passed through Qudshanis on his "Across Persia and Europe on Pony-Back" expedition. A photo he took shows Hormizd standing alongside his sister Surma (with his brother Zaya or Poulos behind him) in front of the cherished Mar Shalita church that was the heart and soul of their village, family, and Assyrian nation. This is the last known image of him.

Soon after Bill galloped on his way, Surma and Hormizd accompanied Dr. Browne to Urmia. No doubt Hormizd visited with the Neesans and saw Beatrice again. She reminisced about England and felt life in Urmia tiring. "Ever since we put our foot home we have not been left alone a minute; day after day people coming to see us," she confided to the Sisters back at St. Katharine's School in Oxfordshire. "This Persian air is so pressing and makes one very lazy, especially the heat, which has started badly a month ago, and I don't know what we shall do in a couple of weeks. One can't endure it in the city and as we still feel afraid of Kurdish raids we dare not go up to our beautiful summer house in the mountain, 12 miles from the city." To Hormizd she may also have confided her longing for escape: "I am tired of people and would just love to live on a desert island with great delight." Apparently, however, Hormizd's powers of persuasion with bickering village leaders over sheep grazing rights, building construction and the proceeds of firewood sales, couldn't convince Beatrice that Qudshanis was the delightful desert island she dreamt of. Whatever appeal marriage to a prince of the patriarchal family held for her (or her family), the frightful prospect of a precarious and harried existence holed up in the wild and remote mountains of Hakkari was not enough to overcome her fears. Thus, the wedding was called off. ²⁷

Further heartbreak for Hormizd followed in the fall, when on September 14th, William Henry Browne --virtually a father-figure to him and his siblings-- died (of an accidental overdose of medicine) in Qudshanis. He was 63 years old. Time for mourning was brief, for in early October Hormizd was sent by Mar Benyamin along with the bishop Mar Aprim to visit Assyrian churches and communities in Russia (specifically Tiflis/Tbilisi, Georgia). Many Assyrians had converted to Russian Orthodoxy and the growing appeal was that unlike the Americans, French, or English, the Russians had the dual-benefit of having a strong military presence in the region, as well as being Orthodox Christians. By the end of the year Mar Benyamin would be exchanging exploratory messages with the head of the Russian mission in Urmia, comparing ecclesiastical practices and customs. This led to speculation of future "unification" between the two churches.

After obtaining passports from Turkish authorities

in nearby Julamerk, Hormizd and Mar Aprim set off for Tiflis. However, as had happened previously to Mar Aprim, they were turned back at the border -- likely by Russian officials paid off by leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church jealous of competition for congregants in their own territory. The two returned to Urmia where Hormizd probably saw Beatrice a last time before continuing on to Constantinople. ²⁸

It was while on his way to the capital that Hormizd's mother Asiat passed away. Surma Khanum memorialized this sad day in a letter to the Neesans and other missionaries still in Urmia: "We had another unexpected loss, of our dear Mother, who had been unwell for these two years, but we thought she was getting on very well this winter until November 19th; I went to

her room in the morning and she told me she had not slept well through the night; yet she was talking of Mar Shimun's arrival the same day from his journey to Jilu and Baz, but at half past two we were called from our duties to see her passing away peacefully to her Lord, without any pain. Mar Shimun arrived half an hour later. We know that she has entered into the joy of her Lord: she had been preparing these two years to meet her Lord. This year we have a little school here, my brothers and some other boys, and as some of them are reading English, they will be very glad of the little books you have sent. Hormizd has gone to Constantinople to read more Turkish, by way of Tiflis with Mar Aprim; we have no news of him for more than two months. We are very anxious about him. . . ." ²⁹

(To be continued . . .)

¹ Shimmon, Paul. "The Assyrians [i.e. Nestorians] numbered some 125,000 before the war. This is exclusive of the Jacobites (Syriac-Orthodox) and the Chaldeans, amounting to about 150,000." *The Churchman*, v. 117, 561. [Churchman]. David Gaunt puts the total Assyrian population at over 500,000 (*Massacres, Resistance, Protectors*, Gorgias Press, 2006: 28).

² In Ottoman administrative system, an autonomous religious community with limited self-governing rights.

³ Semi-independent tribes who traditionally paid tribute only to their patriarch. As opposed to "rayats," or tribute-paying subjects of local Kurdish Aghas (rulers).

⁴ d'Mar Shimun, Surma. *Assyrian Church Customs & the Murder of Mar Shimun*. Vehicle Editions, 1920, 71. [Surma].

⁵ *The Living Church Magazine*, v. 64, 9. [LivChurch]. Erzurum would in fact be captured by the Russians on February 16, 1916.

⁶ Seat of government in Constantinople.

⁷ Ismail, Shlemon & Yacu Malik. *Assyrians and Two World Wars*. Assyrian Student's Literary Committee, Tehran, English ed., 1964, 49. [MalikIsmail].

⁸ *LivChurch* (64): 9.

⁹ Surma: 72-73.

¹⁰ *Churchman* (117): 56.

¹¹ d'Mar Shimun, Surma. *Private Diaries*, Mar Shimun Memorial Foundation. 27 Apr. 1912. [SurmaDiary].

¹² Hale (Cochran), Katharine Talcott. *Letters From Persia. Presbyterian Historical Society*. Unpublished. 1st ed 1916; rebound, 1936, 372-3.

¹³ Percy, Earl H.A.G. (Lord Warkworth). Unpublished diary, Alnwick Castle, England, 1897. [CochranDiary].

¹⁴ d'Mar Shimun, Theodore. *The History of the Patriarchal Succession of the d'Mar Shimun Family*. English ed., 2008, 25. [MarShimun].

¹⁵ Bill, J.H. "Across Europe and Asia on Ponyback," *Wide World Magazine*, 167, 28 (March 1912): 472.

¹⁶ *Assyrian Mission Quarterly Papers*, v. 3, no. 68, 826-7. Atour Publications, Lulu Press Inc. [AMQ].

¹⁷ *AMQ* 3 (74): 939-40.

¹⁸ *AMQ* 3 (74): 948-9.

¹⁹ *AMQ* 4 (80): 1032-33.

²⁰ *AMQ* 4 (77): 979-82.

²¹ *AMQ* 4 (76): 971.

²² *AMQ* 4 (78): 997-8; Heazell, F.N. *Kurds & Christians*, W. Gardner, Darton & Co., London, 1913: 176. [Heazell].

²³ *AMQ* 4 (79): 1011.

²⁴ *AMQ* 4 (80): 1030-1.

²⁵ Heazell: 176.

²⁶ *AMQ* 4 (80): 1032-33.

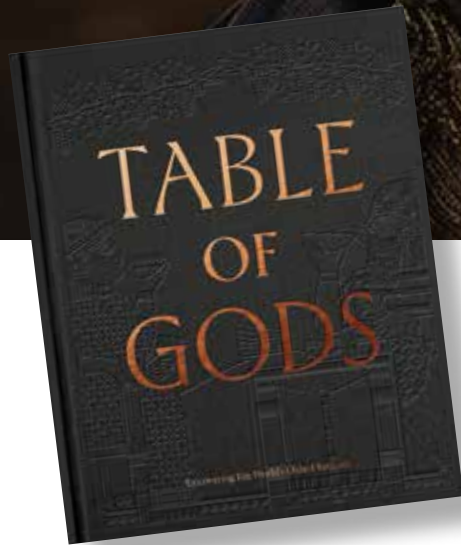
²⁷ Coakley, J.F. "Yaroo M. Neesan, 'A Missionary To His Own People,'" *ARAM*, 5 (1993), 95; *St. Katharine's School Magazine*, Wantage, Oxfordshire (Sep. 1907), 11; (Summer, 1912): 25-6.

²⁸ *MarShimun*: 61.

²⁹ *AMQ* 4 (83): 1071.

Bringing Ancient Assyria Back to Life

By
Arim Hawsho and
Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.



Nineveh Magazine Assistant Editor interviews Arim Hawsho of Table of Gods. Arim is an extraordinarily talented, young Assyrian whose entrepreneurial and artistic qualities have revived ancient Assyrian gods and flavors.

EMH: Hi Arim, I'm pleased to meet you and especially excited to introduce you to our readers of *Nineveh Magazine*. Can you please tell us a bit about yourself and your background?

AH: I'm a second-generation Swedish-Assyrian who lives in Stockholm with my wife and three toddlers. My father was born in Turabdin and my mother in Qamishli. Both immigrated to Sweden in the early 1970s. After high school, I joined a fintech startup. This was in 2014. But while working full time, I also studied screenwriting for two years. I wrote several screenplays during this period. One about the Assyrian genocide that got me a representative from Hollywood. It never got picked up, but I still wanted to explore and tell stories about my ancestral history. In 2019, I found the book, "The Oldest Cuisine in the World," by Assyriologist Jean Bottero. That eventually led to the idea of "Table of Gods." By the end of 2020, I quit my job to publish "Table of Gods." I had come to realize that I couldn't do it half-heartedly. But I didn't know how much it would take doing it whole-heartedly either. I planned to release the book in 2021. And now it's 2023 :)

EMH: You've created a truly extraordinary YouTube channel that is a mix of ancient and modern Assyria. Please tell our readers more about your channel. What is it about and where can it be found?

AH: I started the YouTube channel with my sister at the end of 2022. The purpose of the channel is the same as for my upcoming book – to make Mesopotamian history interesting and accessible to everyone. I



explore food and history, just as with my book. Lately, I've tried to make episodes that are more cinematic. Such as the latest release, a documentary about the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal. Writing about real-life characters is challenging because you need to be historically correct while also trying to make it engaging for the viewer.

EMH: One of the themes of your channel is ancient Assyrian cooking, which will be the topic of your upcoming cookbook, *Table of Gods*. Who/What motivated you to start your journey into the culinary arts of ancient Assyria? Also, how can our readers sign up to be on the waiting list for the cookbook?

AH: I think food and drink are the most universal themes in the world. And since my parents have been running restaurants and cooking professionally (and for fun) their entire adult lives, I've grown up in a home of food. But my greatest strength is eating, which is why my parents are the ones who create the recipes for "Table of Gods." It starts with me doing all the research, deciding what type of dish we should recreate from the past. After a workshop where we discuss ideas, my parents then make a few versions of the dish. Three of the dishes we've created are available at tableofgods.com for anyone who signs up on the waiting list for the book. My goal is to finish the book by 2023 and print it in 2024.

EMH: I have been particularly impressed with the graphics in your videos. They really bring the characters (both historical and mythical) of ancient Assyria to life! How do you do that?

AH: We use AI and Photoshop, as well as a powerful computer. But I can't take the credit for them; it's my sister (who got all the technical genes) who is the creator behind the graphics.

EMH: I've learned so much from your videos and am intrigued by how detailed your scripts are regarding ancient Assyrian myths and actual history. How do you go about writing the scripts for your videos and getting all the information?





AH: I think social media is key because it connects anyone interested in Assyrian history from anywhere in the world. There's a lot of interest in Assyrian and ancient Mesopotamian history in general. I've connected with Assyrians as well as non-Assyrians that share this interest.

EMH: You exhibit a strong connection to your Assyrian heritage. Has this always been the case? Or was there a pivotal moment in your life that brought that connection to life?

AH: Growing up in Sweden, where there's a huge Assyrian community, I've had a strong connection to my heritage since childhood. I've always loved history, movies, and storytelling. And I've always wondered why there are so many movies and fiction books about ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, etc., but barely anything about Assyria, Akkad, or Babylonia? At some point, I decided I was going to do something about it.

EMH: Besides your upcoming cookbook Table of Gods, what other projects do you have in the pipeline?

AH: I try to focus on the book right now. At the same time, I can't stop my ideas from popping up (especially before I go to bed, which I hate because it ruins my sleep). Some of these ideas are a Table of Gods restaurant, brewing our beer on a large scale so it can be distributed worldwide. Writing screenplays, novels, and documentaries, especially featured in the Neo-Assyrian era, which is the period I'm most interested in. I'm definitely starting the next project the day after the Table of Gods book is released. The challenge will be deciding what I should pursue.

To check out my latest videos, please go to <https://www.youtube.com/@tableofgods> or visit my website <https://www.tableofgods.com/>.

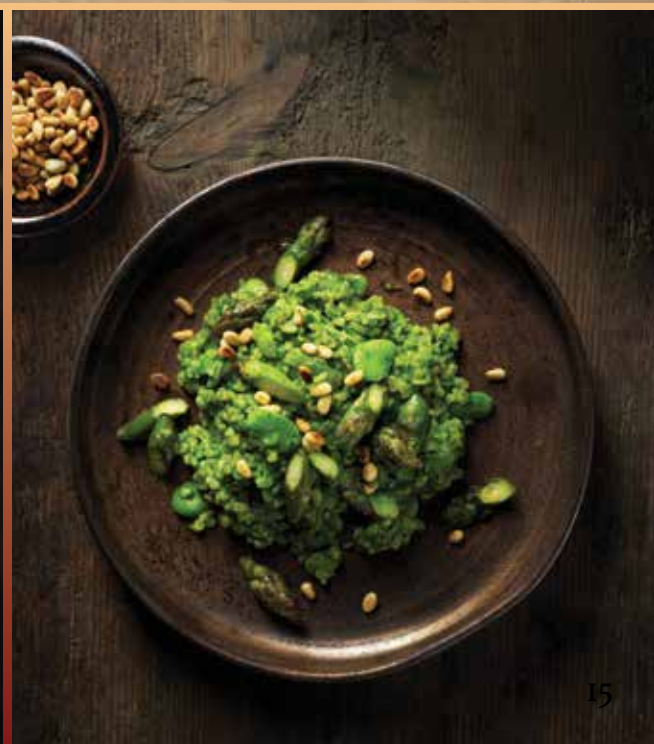


AH: I can give an example of my latest 1-hour documentary about Ashurbanipal. It started with the idea, obviously. Then I read a book about Ashurbanipal ("I am Ashurbanipal: King of the World, King of Assyria") and several papers written by scholars about the Assyrian king. While gathering all this information (which can take weeks), I structure the sources I want to use and start writing the outline for the script. Then starts the fun – fleshing out the outline. And this is usually faster, although it involves writing well above 10,000 words. Then I usually send the script to trusted historians or other editors for feedback on historical facts as well as language and story. And then it's ready to be recorded and edited, which is a whole other beast :)

EMH: In a couple of your videos, you discuss your quite interesting and amusing attempts at recreating ancient Assyrian beers. Please tell our readers more about this.

AH: Yes! The beer recipes in "Table of Gods" are the ones I'm most proud of. It's well-known that beer was the national drink in Assyria as well as Babylonia and Sumer. So, it felt obvious to include beer recipes in the book. But having no experience with it, we failed with our brews for months. Until I had enough and reached out to all breweries I could find in Stockholm. Eventually, one very friendly individual told us what we were doing wrong and how we should proceed to recreate these ancient beers. Since then, we've been brewing lots of different beers. Alappanu, the Assyrian pomegranate beer, is one of them. To learn more about what these beers taste like and how we brew them, go to my YouTube channel @tableofgods, and you'll find two videos about it :)

EMH: In what ways do you believe that social media can increase Assyrian presence on the world stage and also, how can it be used to increase the interest of Assyrian youth in their unique heritage?



Nina Dilon, Singer

An interview by Pavel Bukreev

Translated from Russian by Nina Georgizova



Pavel: Please, tell us about yourself, about your parents.

Nina: I was born in Marseille, France. My ancestors were from Zereni, Turkey. I am a purebred Assyrian. During the genocide in 1914-1915, my grandmother fled to France. She and her children fled through the mountains, risking their lives. The French mission in Istanbul put the refugees on a ship and that is how they ended up in Marseille. At first, they lived in a refugee camp. By that time, my grandfather had been living in America for several years; he was a Christian missionary. Upon his return home, he saw a completely destroyed village. He started looking for his family and found them, 15 years later, in France. The family was finally reunited. My parents were born in France. I was 3 years old when my parents and I moved to Moscow. In the 1950s, my father was invited to the USSR as an accomplished boxer. Over time, he acquired many contacts. He met the head coach of the boxing team of the Soviet Union, Yuri Radonyak. They became very close friends. Boxing was a significant part of my father's life. Much later, when he retired, he was often invited to training camps as a judge.

As a child, there was always French music in our house. My mother was a singer and had an exceptionally beautiful voice, very similar to the voice of Edith Piaf. As fate would have it, I inherited her voice. I consider it God's blessing. After high-school I graduated from a trade school, sang in the Loktev's Song and Dance com-pany. I had planned to enroll in music school; but, after I married, my husband banned me from pursuing a career in music. We met in Moscow; then, lived in Yerevan, where my husband was from. During that time, I became acquainted with the Armeni-an people, with their language, and their culture. I participated in a major competition organized by the State TV and Radio of Armenia. About 900

people participated in this competition. Only 14 folk and 14 pop singers advanced. I was among them. After the first round, I was invited to the state orchestra, where I went through a trial recording. My husband did not allow me to continue; he believed that his wife belonged at home. I have come to terms with my position as a housewife.

By that time my parents had separated, and I did not have any support. I had two



children; but, I always felt that I was not living my life fully, and music continued to lure me in. Gradually, I realized that my fate was meant to be different, without a husband, and back in the world of music. At first, I was very scared; but, I felt that I couldn't change any-thing. At such moments one begins to understand that one doesn't belong to oneself anymore. My friends supported me; but, they used to tell me: "I wish you had started singing earlier..."; to which I replied: "it's never too late to learn and create."

Pavel: What is your education?

Nina: I am an electrical engineer of the automatic switching center. I am a graduate of a technical school. I used to rehearse songs at the station where I worked. I would walk along large halls and sing. While working there, I started touring all over Russia. Then, my manager asked me to stop touring; I was afraid to tell him that I had just begun. My colleagues worked my shifts and covered my absence. In the mean time, I enrolled in a two-year course at GITIS Acad-emy (the Russian University of Theater Arts) and continued working at the station. I sang in French. My graduation piece was "Non je ne regrette rien". One day, in 1996, I was getting ready for work, when I saw a karaoke show on TV. They were casting for an upcoming show. I auditioned and was accepted. When I first saw myself on TV, it invigorated me. At 45, I realized that music is everything to me. And, so, gradually from the telephone station I switched to the world of music.

Pavel: When did you have your first solo concert?

Nina: In 2006, in the House of Journalists in Arbat (historic center of Moscow).

Pavel: What was your first musical project?



Nina: I am a chanson singer. I had an idea to record a CD with songs by Edith Piaf. It took me 2 years, to record 8 songs. It was a very diffi-cult project for me. I named it "Piaf in the 21st century". I finished this project by writing a song - a dedication to Edith Piaf. I named it "Sparrow". The word Piaf is translated as sparrow. When the CD came out, it coincided with the 40th anniversary of Edith Piaf's death. I dedi-cated this album





to my parents. I thought that when I finished recording, I would put the CD on the shelf and forget about it; but, this was just the beginning. Around 2004 I gave my CD to my vocal teacher, an opera singer. She told me that I would laugh at this project in a couple of years. She assured me that my voice would be much better. I was offended; but, in the end, she was right. I actually ended up rewriting many songs. My first success was at the European Film Festival in Kaliningrad, in 2007. I was recommended to the organizers by the French embassy. I opened the screening of the French film: *“Life in Pink Color”*, about Edith Piaf. There are actually Assyrians in Kaliningrad. I was warmly welcomed by Oleg Avdyshev, head of the Assyrian community in Kaliningrad. He showed me the city and organized my PR campaign. I am forever grateful to him. I stayed there for 3 days, but, this trip made a lasting impression on me.

For 10 years I performed at the Moscow International House of Music. Then, in 2017, I became very ill; I lost my voice and for the first time in my life I had to cancel my concert. An Assyrian doctor, Elena Ykovleva, helped me a lot. She, practically brought me back to life, because my situation of critical. The loss of my

voice took a toll on me; but, eventually, I recovered and continued to sing. I have to say, Assyrians have a very interesting range of sounds and peculiar voice vibrations. In the summer of 2021, my dream came true: I won the prestigious competition *“You are super 60+”*. I have always dreamed of getting into a big competition and it finally happened. After this project, I started believing that dreams do come true.

Pavel: *Congratulations! What kind of music and which musicians did you like as a child?*

Nina: I have always been fond of Italian and French pop music; but, I did not like English music. My idol has, of course, always been Edith Piaf and the Italian singer, Milva. I often listened to Milva and tried to learn from her. She also participated in the San Remo song contests. I listened to all San Remo competitions until 1969. They used to sing to an orchestra, and then they started lip syncing and I lost interest in them. God willing, I will be able to record an album that I will name: *“San Remo of my Childhood”*.

Pavel: *Have you performed anywhere else besides Moscow?*

Nina: Yes. I have toured all over Russia: Kemerovo, Tyumen, Murmansk, Orenburg. My biggest fans are in Murmansk. They are always excited to see me perform; my concert halls are always full. A couple of years ago, in Kostroma, I opened the musical season at the Kostroma Philharmonic with their philharmonic orchestra. The day before I arrived in Kostroma, one violinist in the orchestra contracted

Covid. They wanted to cancel the opening; but, then they thought that canceling was a bad omen. And, the head of the Philharmonic decided to replace the whole orchestra. My concert was called: *“Under the Paris Sky”*. It was a great success.

Pavel: *Have you performed outside of Russia?*

Nina: Yes. There are Russian cultural centers in Europe. My first concert was in Denmark, in Copenhagen. After that, it was Finland. Then, there was Paris and the south of France. Slovakia used to invite me often, before the lockdown. I added famous Russian songs to my repertoire, which are loved by everybody; songs like: *“Those Evening Bells”*, *“Black Eyes”*, *“Podmoskovnye Evenings”*, and others.

Pavel: *Did you sing the songs of Edith Piaf in France?*

Nina: Yes; and, after I sang my versions of Piaf in France, in Perpignan, Saint-André, Aksat, etc., I noticed that the French audience loved me. It gave me a feeling of internal freedom. And, I must say that what I performed in France, I do not sing in Russia. So, I had two repertoires of songs by Edith Piaf. I had to translate some songs for the Russian audience, which I didn't have to do for the French audience. I sing in 5 languages: Russian, Assyrian, French, Italian, and Armenian. Journalists distinguished my modern versions of Piaf songs. And, they also highlighted my peculiar timbre, the Assyrian timbre, that I was talking about. Along with French and Italian hits, I also performed Russian romances there. I have a dream to sing Russian romances in Assyrian. This idea came to me 10 years ago; but, I believe, now is the time to finally make it happen. I even have a name for this project: *“Russian Romances in the Language of Christ”*.

Pavel: *What advice would you give to aspiring artists?*

Nina: It is always difficult to give advice, because not everyone has the strength to fulfill their dreams. It is very difficult because the real world is cruel. But, no matter what, always listen to your heart! It is the most faithful compass in your life. And, do everything with love; because, Love is God. Be happy!



**Assyrian Poet
Yosip Bet Yosip**

By Dr. Julia Bajone Hallisy



Yosip Bet Yosip as the Master of Ceremonies at a Kha b-Nisan Celebration



Yosip Bet Yosip in Traditional Folk Dress at Shooshata Umtanaia in Tehran



Yosip Bet Yosip's Parents Rabi Korush Bet Yosip and Anna Khoshaba Bet Yosip



Nineveh Choir in Tehran led by Maestro Nebu Issabey Yosip Bet Yosip at far right

I came to know Yosip Bet Yosip in the most modern of ways – via a Zoom meeting. It was obvious almost immediately that I wasn't speaking with someone who merely had an interest in preserving Assyrian history. Yosip Bet Yosip is a renowned poet who, among many other laudable accomplishments, wrote the words to Roomrama, the Assyrian national anthem. Yosip also has a musical background and sang in the Nineveh Choir both in Iran and in the United States. His life and work have been influenced by famed Assyrian writers including Rabi Biyamen Arsanos, Shlemon Esho D Salamas, Rabi Adai Alkhas, and John Alkhas. Yosip was also inspired by Assyrian playwrights, composers, and poets including Dr. Fraidon Atoraya, William Daniel, Nebu Issabey, Hannibal Alkhas, and Ninos Aho.

Yosip Bet Yosip's father, Cyrus Bet Yosip (Rabi Korush) was both a teacher and a poet in Urmia. When Yosip saw the way people responded to his father's patriotic orations, it inspired him to follow the same path. Yosip recalls, "As a child, I wasn't sure if people were moved by the words of my father or by the emotion he conveyed when reading his poems. I suspect it was both. I'm sure that some of the listeners didn't understand every word or some of the literary terms my father used, but I could see how his heartfelt expression helped them understand the meaning of his message. Looking at the faces of the listeners made me wish I could be just like my father."

Early Memories

"When I was young, I clearly remember an Assyrian civic organization in Urmia selling tickets to a New Year's party. It was the first time that all the local families would celebrate the New Year together as a community. Before that, people had private family celebrations for the holiday. When members of the civic organization came to our house to sell tickets, my father bought tickets for the four of us in my immediate family and one for my cousin who lived with us while attending school. My father invited the people selling tickets into our house and while drinking tea a conversation ensued about the goals of the organization and how to preserve the culture of our nation. My father read a few of his poems to them and they were fascinated by the deep meaning in each paragraph. The leaders invited my father

to read his poems at their next membership meeting, but my father declined because he had previously been imprisoned for expressing his political beliefs."

Yosip further explains, "The Assyrians were a minority presence in Urmia at the time of the Second World War. The horrifying memories of the genocide against Assyrians committed by the Ottoman regime a quarter century prior still lived in the hearts of our people. As geopolitical events unfolded, the Assyrians found themselves in a difficult position as they had to decide if they would support Jafar Pishevari and his movement to divide Iran by annexing Azerbaijan into an independent province. Pishevari was a revolutionary who had the support of the Russian government. At the time, it was thought that Russia was planning to occupy Northern Iran – which it did some years later. To avoid being victimized by another genocide, our people felt obligated to participate in an uprising by the side seen as having more power. My father was accused of working against the central government and was sent to prison. We lived under the care of my maternal uncles for years with no hope of my father ever being free. Every week we expected to hear that he had been executed. But after 3 ½ years, he was miraculously freed when the Shah ordered the release of all political prisoners."

Even though Yosip's father didn't feel comfortable speaking publicly at political events, he told the leaders, "My children can be part of your youth organization and safely be active in the community to learn from you how to serve their nation." Youth organizations were not seen as being political and the government had no interest in their activities. Rabi Korush taught Yosip and his sister, Alice, how to recite his poems and how to explain their meaning to the audience. Yosip recalls his first poetry reading, "I was standing in the back of the room, and I wasn't tall enough to be seen so the organizers had me stand on a chair at the front of the room. After I finished reading my father's poem the way he had taught me to narrate it, I heard what sounded like thunderous clapping. I felt like I was flying!"

Yosip later began to write Assyrian songs, which came to him easily because he could include a melody. Eventually, he realized, "With the experience of reading and interpreting

my father's poems, developing old folk melodies, and at the urging of Ninos Aho, I began to feel that I could write my own patriotic poems. So, I challenged myself to create poems with deep meaning. My collaborations with Ninos Aho led to recognition in the Assyrian community and to our shared worldwide travels to read our poetry." Yosip remembers with fondness, "So many years, so many poems."

Poetry

Poetry originated as an oral art using both spoken words and songs expressed through public storytelling. Storytellers were our original and enduring historians- the keepers of our most precious verses, songs, and prayers. Music and poetry have been intertwined for centuries and both art forms create deep, visceral reactions. Being skilled in both genres infuses Yosip Bet Yosip's work with rhythm and flow as it reveals its deeper meaning. Yosip's poems encourage us to form our own emotional response as we decide what resonates with us and what we choose to hold in our hearts after reading his words.

We often think of poetry as one individual's expression of his or her own personal thoughts and opinions. But Yosip's poems are much more than stanzas of lyrical words with an underlying message. Yosip's poetry helps explain our Mesopotamian heritage and the themes embedded in his poems will always echo through our nation. His poems are the vessels for what we hold sacred in the worldwide Assyrian community. Preserving and sharing his words ensures that new generations will learn our history directly from the people who lived it. Without their personal accounts, our story would likely be told by those who conquered and oppressed us - the people who often alter the facts to diminish or even erase our history.

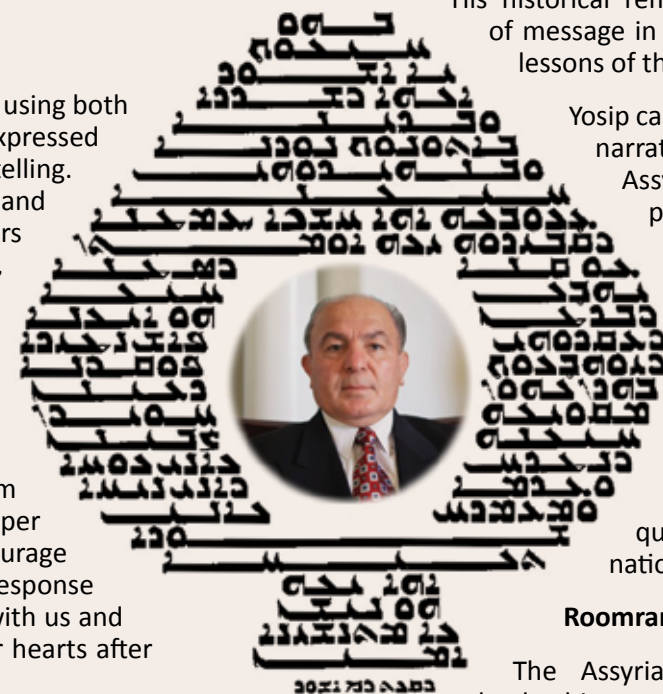
Yosip's poetry encourages humility in its readers because it has the courage to show a world eternally impacted by the inherent weaknesses and flaws in human beings. Even when it's painful, there's always power in knowing the truths of our past. Yosip's words make us reflect on issues outside of our small part of the world and remind us that the times we live in are increasingly complex and conflicted.

His historical remembrances provide a continuity of message in a world that so easily forgets the lessons of the past.

Yosip calls on us to elevate our voice in the narrative of both ancient and modern Assyrian history. The themes in his poetry address the realities of the past, our ongoing and recurring challenges, and a blueprint for our way forward. The level of introspection required to appreciate Yosip's poems ultimately leave us to answer for ourselves, "What does it mean to me to be an Assyrian and how does my answer to that question translate into action for my nation?"

Roomrama

The Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA), a leadership council of Assyrian organizations worldwide, was established in 1968. The Alliance was seeking symbols to preserve the Assyrian identity and a national anthem was one of their goals. They asked many Assyrian composers to write an anthem, and Maestro Nebu Issabey wrote a melody for a national anthem using Yosip Bet Yosip's lyrics and sent a recording to the Assyrian Universal Alliance. The collaborative recorded entry from Nebu Issabey and Yosip Bet Yosip was selected as the winner. In 2013, Tiglat Issabey, the son of Nebu Issabey and current President of the Assyrian Cultural Foundation, rearranged "Roomrama" for a remarkable performance by the Chicago Philharmonic Orchestra.

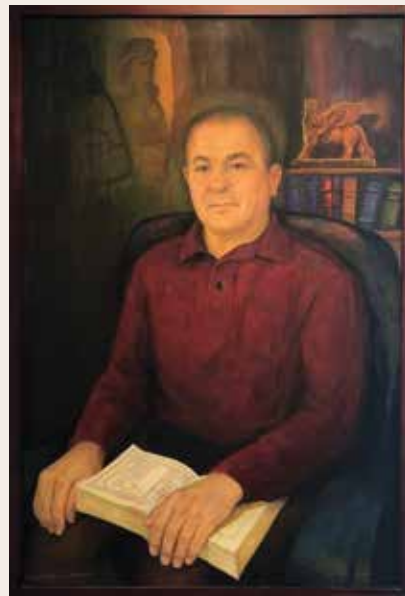


Above center: Yosip Bet Yosip Assyrian TreePoem

Portrait of Yosip Bet Yosip
by Artist Alexy Gevargiz



Yosip Bet Yosip at the age of 12



Yosip Bet Yosip at his Desk in Turlock, California



Yosip Bet Yosip at his Home in Turlock, California



Yosip Bet Yosip at the World Congress of Poets with Ninos Aho

Nebu Issabey and Yosip Bet Yosip wanted to create an anthem to be used worldwide as a unifying force for the Assyrian nation. Yosip was inspired by Beethoven's Choral Symphony and how it incorporated Schiller's poem, Ode to Joy, with its inspiring message of the triumph of brotherhood and peace over conflict and suffering.

Yosip wrote the words of Roomrama in commemoration of Mesopotamia, universally known as the cradle of civilization. Yosip states, "Our forefathers helped spread civilization through the world. They openly shared their discoveries of the wheel, mathematics, rules of order and law, the first library, and astronomy, with their neighbors. Modern-day Assyrians can be teachers to the world as we have the knowledge and experience to lead by example. Modern-day Assyrians cannot live in struggle. Living in harmony with a high elevation of thought allows people to see each other and turn away from the differences between them."

Yosip continues, "The future of humanity lies in rejecting conflict. We must embrace this mindset and rise above discord and hatred. Thinking at a high level will let us move mountains. When nations are good to each other and live in harmony, God rewards His people by ensuring their place next to Him. It's our path to Paradise."

Yosip Bet Yosip's words of peace expressed in Roomrama:

*"In reverence of the exalted name of our Assyrian nation, let us stand.
Salute her, she who became the cradle of civilization.
Give admiration to our forefathers who radiated into the world,
As they directed humanity to live in peace until eternity."*

Roomrama was written to encourage unity, and Yosip explains, "Unification must first come from a deep need within our own hearts."

The Lessons of Gilgamesh

Yosip Bet Yosip was inspired and moved by accounts of Assyrian historical events and feels strongly that one must have a foundation of knowledge of our history to fully understand his poems. He implores us to examine our historical events as the underlying context from which we

think, analyze, and then form our own conclusions. The Epic of Gilgamesh is one part of Mesopotamian history that Yosip wants all Assyrians to read because it's such an important and enduring part of our past.

The story of Gilgamesh first appeared almost 2000 years BC in five short poems first written in the Sumerian language but shared by all Mesopotamians. Yosip feels it's an important narrative for Assyrians because it's an account of the universal truths of the human condition. Yosip states, "It's a timeless story about the meaning of life with valuable lessons for each new generation."

One of the major themes in the Epic of Gilgamesh is that it's futile to search for eternal life because death is an inevitable part of being human. Yosip says, "Human bodies are built from earthly elements, minerals, and oxygen. When the time comes that elements and oxygen can no longer sustain our bodies, we will die. It is written in the bible that all of us came from the earth and will return to the ground as dust."

In a conversation between Utnapishtim (Noah) and Gilgamesh from Yosip Bet Yosip's poem "Gilgamesh":

*Do not complain of the destiny of mortal men,
Or Gods who are our masters.
Humans are made of natural components,
The body is composed of material elements.
In due time, its composition changes
And turns into dust after death.*

Yosip explains, "Once we accept this concept, we will realize that we no longer need to worry as much about our physical bodies or how long we will have on earth because it's our actions, deeds, and choices that will live on. Ego, brutality, and taking advantage of others will not lead us to eternal life. Friendship, loyalty, and respect for others are what makes our souls sing."

"Garden of God" Poem

Yosip Bet Yosip's poem "Garden of God" was inspired by the American-led bombing of Iraq in 1991 during the Gulf War and is dedicated to the Christian minority who remain in our ancestral homeland. Writing about any genocide

makes a powerful statement that says, 'This is us. This is our history. It was real and it happened, and no one can deny that reality as long as even one of us remembers.' The poem addresses the many struggles of Assyrians in the homeland – forced displacement and living as refugees in their own part of the world, the drying of their life-giving lakes and rivers, and a lack of protection from the "evil will" of those who persecute them.

Yosip sees Assyrians living in the Middle East as seedlings rooted in the soil of our homeland. They walk in the footsteps of our forefathers, and they are the foundation upon which a new era of Assyrian history will be written. The sentiments within "Garden of God" help hold a place of sorrow in our hearts, which frees our minds to embrace the feelings of wonder and gratitude it expresses. Assyrians may be forever entwined with international conflict and the unexplainable and endless cruelty of man, but we also possess a remarkable will to connect and survive.

Readers will forever find our past, present, and future Assyrian history embedded in the words of "Garden of God".

A Message to Young Assyrians

Yosip wants young Assyrians to remember that "a high level of education or power does not necessarily result in a high level of humanity. Any leader can have knowledge and power without having humanity. Politics can result in great power being given to negative people. If you think you are patriotic, first ask yourself if you have reached your highest level of humanity."

Yosip elaborates, "Our quest for a homeland is a situation that tests our own humanity. Even if we had our land back, we would still have to be neighbors with people who have lived on our lands – and on their own neighboring lands -- for centuries. Should we push others off the land they live on to reclaim our own? Should we displace other people as we have experienced? Seeking a homeland is our right, but it brings with it difficult questions that require answers that are compatible with our Christian faith." Yosip concludes by saying, "Remember that In Christianity there are no nations, only one unifying faith in God."

Yosip continues, "For 1500 years the Assyrians West of the Euphrates didn't know of the Eastern Assyrians. We were separated by religion and geography. For over a millennium, we didn't even know that we were brothers and sisters. The genocide was an atrocity perpetrated against us, but it also made us close. We found our way back to each other even after being forced to flee to almost forty countries of the world. Each generation carries the responsibility to preserve our connection to each other."

The wisdom and hope contained in our Assyrian poems, songs, and stories connect us to each other and to the world. It's a bond that can't be taken away or destroyed by sledgehammers. The words of our writers, composers, and poets have endured through generations – and will continue to do so- because the sentiments they hold within live on in our heads and in our hearts. Yosip's poems don't provide all the answers or dictate the actions we should take, but they do contain the power to call us to be living examples of the way to treat our fellow man.

What Gives Him Hope?

Yosip reflects, "It's true that hope seems harder to find in our world. What I believe and what gives me hope is this: if there was a nuclear war that left only 100 people in the world, those people would look at each other with acceptance and support. Race, religion, cultural differences, and social status would mean nothing. These people would turn to each other for sustenance and survival with unconditional love. This wonderful part of human nature is just as undeniable as the dark side of humanity."

Hopeful words (indirect quotation) from the Seventh Stanza of Yosip Bet Yosip's poem, "Garden of God":

*May someday advocates of peace
Rise up strong and step forward
To rescue from destruction not only you,
But all others who have been oppressed.
To bring forth the age of holy peace
And shield humanity from the ruthlessness of evil.*

"Garden of God", "Roomrama", and "Gilgamesh" were translated from the Assyrian language into English by Susan and Bellos Nisan.

An Interview with Young Podcaster Emmanuel Romanous

By Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.



Emmanuel Romanous

The following interview took place on August 14, 2023.

Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber (EMH): Please tell our *Nineveh Magazine* readers a bit about yourself and your background.

Emmanuel Romanous (ER): I'm a first-generation Assyrian-Jordanian born and raised in Arizona. I attended ASU for university and graduated with a bachelors in electrical engineering. Around that same time, in my third year of college, I founded and started Lazy Intellectuals which led me to doing interviews now, shortly after got my master's degree at 22 years of age in science and engineering.

EMH: You've created a podcast in which you interview influential people. Please tell our readers more about your podcast. What is it about and where can it be found?

ER: I was 21 years old when lazy intellectuals first became a thing. It started out as a channel where I would take the best books that I thought I could summarize and then put out videos explaining the main points of the books. I also was testing myself to see how much information I retained from reading by scripting the main takeaways and recording the videos. One year later, I shifted towards interviewing individuals who are creating something amazing with their lives, in hopes of inspiring someone to do so with their life. My ultimate mission is to be a teacher who spreads practical knowledge from books I've read and experiences I've had, hoping to inspire individuals to make a positive change in their lives, the same way someone else did for me. Full Lazy intellectuals' videos can be found on YouTube, and you can follow my social media @emmanuelromanous on Instagram and @Lazyintellectuals for short clips.

EMH: Who/What motivated you to start this journey in podcasting?

ER: The best piece of advice I ever got in my life was from my father when I was a kid. He said to me, "The only thing in this life that's free is advice, son. When someone older than you is speaking, always listen. If you like it, take it. If you don't, leave it. But always listen." Because of that advice I kept an open mind when it came to things outside of my comfort zone. When a leader walks into a room, most people feel intimidated, but when I saw Patrick Bet-David's videos, I felt inspired. His videos related to me since he is half-Assyrian as well, and the topics of his

videos resonated with what I was chasing at that time. I know that if I work hard and stay consistent, I can do what Patrick is doing, at least on a smaller scale. It was for sure my father, Romanous Romanous, and Patrick Bet-David who motivated me to start this journey, but without Patrick's content, I would not be making my own today.

EMH: Please tell us about a few of your most memorable interviews and what made them especially memorable?

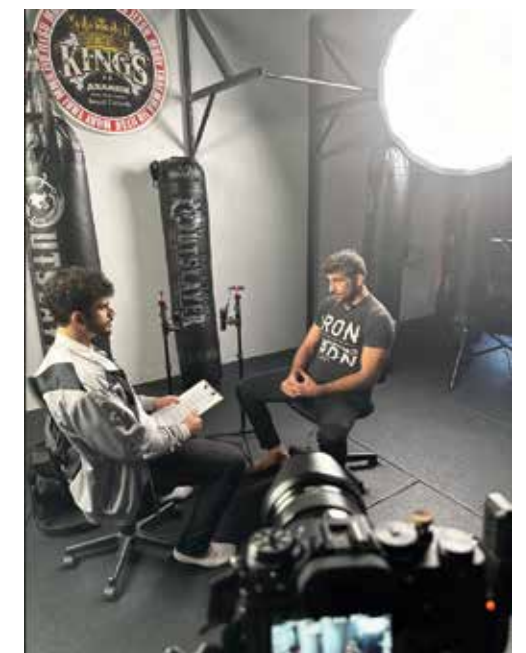
ER: The most memorable interview must be the one I did with Georgii Eivas since it was my first interview. I knew this would either give me credibility in this field of work or show people the content was not worth watching. So, the foundation was set with that particular interview, and it was thankfully a successful conversation. But other than that, Beniell Dariush and I had an amazing conversation, as he is a UFC fighter who I've been a fan of since 2018. That was amazing! He also is beloved universally across the Assyrian community so sitting down with an Assyrian icon was surreal. Beniell also autographed a graded PSA 10 card for my collection. That discussion currently sits as my most viewed interview. Finally, I must say that sitting down with the Assyrian religious leader, H.H. Mar Awa III, was a conversation I felt extremely necessary to have. The questions I posed and the answers His Holiness provided were heavy. I planned to ask him more questions but was pressed on time unfortunately. His Holiness kindly agreed with a smile about setting up a round two with me on Lazy Intellectuals in the future.



Interview with MMA Fighter, Georgii Eivas



Interview with H.H. Mar Awa III, Catholicos Patriarch Assyrian Church of the East



Interview with Professional Mixed Martial Artist, Beniell Dariush

EMH: In what ways do you believe that social media can increase Assyrian presence on the world stage?

ER: In the 1980s, Youbert, Youkhana and Yousif, the three Assyrian men whom we remember every Assyrian Martyrs' Day, died in their attempts to organize a pro-Assyrian political party while trying to get a newspaper outside of Iraq's borders under Saddam Hussein's Regime. It was this same newspaper, roughly one decade later, that finally, once it reached the outside world, shed light upon the atrocities that the Assyrian people were facing in Iraq. As a result, people started to hear about what was truly happening to our people. If one newspaper could do that in the 80s and 90s, and if people were willing to die over it, imagine the power of social media today if wielded and used properly. I believe social media will be the leading contributing factor to Assyria's longevity. If not in the physical world, then as a Digital Assyria.

EMH: How can social media be used to increase the interest of Assyrian youth in their unique language and heritage?

ER: I had a conversation with Patrick Bet-David, and he told me, "You have to sell the dream." (In regard to an off-topic conversation). The "You have to sell the dream" stuck with me. That phrase applies to almost everything today. If you want the next generation of Assyrians to proudly hold the torch passed onto them, you must sell them the dream of why the sacrifice is worth it and why it's cool to associate yourself with this ethnic group. Selling the dream of being Assyrian, especially on social media, is how you'll get the next wave of innovative thinkers with modern input, education, and understanding towards new world standards. So, in short, use social media to sell the dream of being Assyrian. It's as simple as that.

EMH: Do you believe that social media is actually serving

the purposes that we've just discussed?

ER: I believe so. I wouldn't be making content if it weren't for Assyrian influencers that came before me. Assyrians may just be in the infantile stages of truly being a topic of mass discussion across all social media. It's a matter of time before we see a huge snowball effect of Assyrians being more recognized globally thanks to social media.

EMH: You exhibit a strong connection to your Assyrian heritage. Has this always been the case? Or was there a pivotal moment in your life that brought that connection to life?

ER: I've always been strongly tied to my ethnic roots. My grandparents and my parents instilled pride within me from my youth. I grew up speaking and understanding the language. I taught myself how to read and write in my late teens (though at a first-grade literacy). I've always been involved in my Assyrian youth church group where we were taught how to dance and always affiliated ourselves with other Assyrian youth groups. I've never steered away from my identity, not one step along this long path of life.

EMH: What other projects do you have in the pipeline?

ER: As for other projects, we're only getting started. You'll have to wait and see! But there is a big vision being executed in the background.

EMH: Are there any other topics or thoughts you'd like to share with our readers?

ER: Thank you for your time and thank you for supporting me. I'll always do my best to represent the ones who stand by me.

EMH: Thank you Emmanuel!



Standing in front of Gishra Dalaleh in Zakho, Iraq - the town my great grandmother was from.

Visiting My Indigenous Homeland of Assyria

Christine Ebrahimi - June 5, 2023

As a kid, I would read books and watch films about other kids visiting their families in their home country. All I remember thinking was that I had no such opportunity since my family, along with thousands of other Assyrian families, had been pushed out of our ancestral homeland for decades on end. I can say that despite being pushed out through genocide, war, and religious persecution - we are still standing strong in Northern Iraq. I was able to travel there with Gishru¹, a non-profit organization that organizes an annual trip for Assyrians from all around the world to visit *Atra*².

Traveling throughout Northern Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan) for two weeks should not be simplified as “an experience.” Rather, it is an opportunity to connect with one’s homeland and our fellow Assyrian brothers and sisters on the ground. Throughout the two week journey, we spent time in Ankawa, Nohadra (Dohuk), Nahla Valley, Alqosh, Zakho, Sapna Valley, and plenty of other villages in between.

It has been 2+ months since I have been back “home” in the San Francisco Bay Area, and I have had countless people ask me what life is like for Assyrians back home. Firstly, yes, it is safe. Despite being a Christian girl from the west, I felt comfortable traveling throughout Northern Iraq. It is a given to be cautious of your whereabouts, however, we are taught to be cautious no matter where we travel to. Even walking through the streets of downtown San Jose can be quite frightening.

Surprisingly enough, the main reason Assyrians are fleeing Iraq nowadays is not because of religious persecution, but because of unemployment. I asked every person I met who was out of school what they did for work and nearly all of them said that they don’t work because there are no jobs available to them. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) has been accused of engaging in nepotistic and corrupt practices, which have given rise to allegations that it operates as a form

of organized crime. These allegations have been supported by reports that Assyrian citizens who pay bribes or promise to vote for KRG officials or political parties are given preferential treatment for employment. While these allegations have not been proven, they raise serious questions about the fairness and transparency of the KRG’s practices.

Upon entering a new town, region, or random location, we encountered plenty of security checkpoints. A checkpoint was where we would be stopped by Kurdish Peshmerga, and our driver would be engaged in dialogue. During the Gishru pre-trip orientation sessions, we were told to remain silent and avoid phone use when approaching a checkpoint. At the checkpoints, the driver was typically asked who we were, where we were going, and how many of us were in the coaster. It was eye-opening to see that when they asked who we were, we did not tell them that we were Assyrian, Chaldean, Suryoyo, or even Aramean. But we told them that we were Christians. Our identity came down to our religion, nothing else. This tells me that they only want to accept us as Christians. In my opinion, this is a silent form of ethnic cleansing. They focus on our religious identity rather than our ethnic identity. As Christians, our religious identity is universal. On the other hand, our ethnic identity as Assyrians is undermined because the KRG would rather claim us as Christians of their land; as opposed to Assyrians - the indigenous people of Iraq.

As I witnessed, it isn’t through violence or genocide that is being used to push Assyrians out. It’s the unspoken and miniscule actions against our people in our homeland that makes them feel unwelcome.

Early on during the Gishru itinerary, we visited a couple of schools. The first school we visited was *Shameil Primary* in Sheyoz, just north of Simele. The students were anxiously anticipating our arrival, peaking their heads out of classrooms while still preparing for their exams. The walls

of the school were filled with art drawn by the students and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) related posters. Textbooks and classroom rules were in Assyrian and everything was written by hand. The classes were not only separated by grade, but by gender. I found myself in the girls sophomore class. I met a young girl named *Perla*, who helped me read the classroom rules printed at the front of each classroom. It took me a few minutes to read about a dozen rules. Perla later told me that she is fluent in Assyrian, Arabic, Kurdish and English. Not only is she fluent in these four languages, but learned all her school subjects in these languages. Quite embarrassing for me to barely be able to read my mother tongue when she is just ten years younger than me. It is important to note that they are choosing to learn and study Assyrian. Their exams are in Kurdish or Arabic. The resilience the



Children dressed in the traditional clothes of Alqosh before the Palm Sunday Parade.

¹ www.gishru.com

² ܐܬܪܐ (Eastern Syriac) - a country, a native land, country of birth

students, teachers, and school administrators have within them to maintain our mother tongue is beyond me.

Afterwards, we headed to *Simele* where we paid a visit to the Simele Massacre site. This site doubles as an archaeological site to honor the 6,000+ Assyrians who were targeted and murdered here between August 7, 1933 - August 11, 1933. However, it fails to be treated with the sanctity that either an archeological site or massacre site deserve. Trash is carelessly littered amongst the skeletal remains. The site itself is in the backyard of a Kurdish man who had to let us in. As if this were not enough of an insult, a telecommunications tower was built directly on top of the site. Throughout the rest of our time in Northern Iraq, this visit in particular left an eerie feeling amongst us all that remained in the back of our minds.

We then headed to *Bahra Middle School* about ten minutes away. We met with Principal Janet Dawood who welcomed us with open arms. This school in particular had to relocate five times in the past 25 years due to difficulties placed on them by the government. Class was still in session so we all dispersed into different classrooms where we were greeted with shy smiles. As soon as we sat down, the teacher began calling on students to recite what they had learned in their Geography and History lessons.

In the midst of the teacher calling on students, they would stand up and recite their answers in Assyrian, I felt a wave of emotion hit me. I felt bittersweet. Bitter at the fact that these school administrators and faculty members had to move schools several times. Bitter at the fact that the Simele Massacre site was less than 10 minutes away from this school and was treated like a trash yard. Yet, I simultaneously felt a feeling of joy knowing that they have no threshold when it comes to resilience. Joyful because these kids choose to overlook their harsh reality with the same love that Jesus has for them. This

juxtaposition of emotions was overwhelming and confusing.

Despite seeing the reality of the sad stories I had always been told, there is still a shining beacon of hope that lives within our land and people. On the day of Kha b’Nissan³ we walked through the streets of Nohadra to celebrate the Akitu Parade. Coming together with thousands of Assyrians to celebrate the New Year was a moment in time I will never forget. I felt united with my people more than ever before. I understood why there are Assyrians who chose to stay in Iraq. Their intentions are clear - this is the ancestral homeland and they will never back away from it. At the end of the parade, we all gathered around to sing and dance to live performances by Ashur Bet Sargis and Talal Graish.

Another memorable day was Palm Sunday. We headed to Alqosh which is known as *Yimma d’Mathwatha*⁴ (Mother of all Villages). After a week of rain and wind, we experienced the sun come out on holy day in one of the most historical Assyrian towns. Listening to the children sing church hymns, parading through the streets of Alqosh with *Osha’na*⁵ in our hands, and finally gathering around to sing and dance in celebration was a moment I will cherish for the rest of my life. The pure goodness in people’s hearts was overflowing throughout this beautiful town. It’s hard to put into words what it feels like to be surrounded by your own people in your homeland to celebrate such a special day.

I urge anyone who has the slightest desire to keep our nation alive; to visit our homeland, to talk to our people there, donate (in-kind, volunteer or monetary) whatever you can, and don’t ever back down from explaining our history to someone who doesn’t know it. Despite all of our minor differences, it is better for us to put our egos aside and unite. Unite in the name of our ancestors who fought for us and for our future children who will continue to fight for us.

³ ܩܘܒܘܠܐ / ܩܘܒܘܠܐ / ܩܘܒܘܠܐ (Eastern Syriac)
- first of April, Akitu, head of the year

⁴ www.atour.com/education/20040922a.html

⁵ ܩܘܒܘܠܐ (Eastern Syriac) - a palm branch

List of Assyrian Foundation of America Donors

The below list includes donations received from August 1, 2023- November 1, 2023 only!
Any donations received after 11/31/2023 will be included in the next issue of the Nineveh Magazine.

Thank you for your generosity and support.

	Needy	Nineveh	Membership	Education	Memorial
Albert P Ishu	\$200.00	\$50.00			
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Dolphine David & Helen Allen	\$100.00				
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William Ramsini		\$120.00		\$300.00	Nineveh: William Ramsini, Renata Ramsini and Larsa Ramsini
Mr & Mrs Jacob Malek-Zadeh	\$1,000.00				

IN MEMORY OF
NELLIE MORAD*

DECEMBER 8, 1923 – OCTOBER 29, 2023

Nellie Morad was born to Yosep and Soreya Morad in 1923, in the village of Chaharbakhsh, in the city of Urmia, Iran. She completed elementary school and continued with 4 years of Catholic school in Urmia. She had 3 brothers: 2 older than her, Menashe and Aprim, and 1 younger brother, Baba. When she was 18 years old, her father sent her to the city of Tabriz to help care for an extended family member, Uncle Yaghob, whose children had lost their mother at a young age. It was very difficult for Uncle Yaghob and Auntie Nellie to raise 3 young boys (Martin, Victor, and Fred). A few years later, with her parents' blessings, she married Uncle Yaghob, raising the 3 boys as if they were her own. A year later, her son, Milton, was born in Tabriz. When Milton was 2 years old, the family moved to Tehran, where their daughter Mimi was born.



Auntie Nellie loved fashion and design. Her interest was drawn to become a hairstylist. Once settled in Tehran in the late 1950s, she attended cosmetology school and received her certificate as a hair stylist. Within a few months, with her husband's help and support, she opened her own hair salon business, quite probably one of very few Assyrian female business owners in Tehran.

Nellie's 3 older sons gradually migrated to United States: Martin in the late 1950's, Victor in the early 60's, and Fred in the late 60's. Once established in the U.S., Victor helped Mimi migrate to the U.S. in 1974, and Milton in 1976. Auntie Nellie and Uncle Yaghob stayed behind for a couple more years to liquidate the beauty salon business and the house before they migrated to the U.S. finally. Uncle Yaghob came in 1977, and Auntie Nellie in 1978.

They settled in Studio City for about 10 years, then they moved to their permanent home in Northridge, not far from their community of long-time friends and extended family members.

Auntie Nellie was an active member of the ladies' Bible Study group, led by the late Margaret Alkhaseh, (Pastor Ladimer Alkhaseh's mother). They initially met at different homes, and later utilized the hall of the Assyrian Catholic Church for their gatherings. Every week, she could not wait for Saturday to come. She would call her dear friend, the late Sonia Shabaz, to be picked up on time and proceed together to the Bible study.

Auntie Nellie loved her family. She was full of joy when all her family gathered for any occasion. When her son Fred and his wife Susan's daughters, Helana and Daniele, got married and began building their own nests, Auntie Nellie was on Cloud Nine. She could not wait to see her granddaughters and baby great-grandsons. She loved all her family members, close and extended. She had an open-door policy for neighbors, guests, and strangers, always welcoming them with a warm heart and loved talking to them. She would share stories of the past and discuss current events. Her favorite part was sharing her faith in Christ and quoting her memorized Bible verses. She always offered prayers that everyone needed. She would start her day with prayer and read her favorite daily devotional book in Assyrian. Nellie had memorized many scriptures from the Bible, her most favorite verse which she affirmed with everyone visiting her, was from:

Romans 8:31 "If God is for us, who can be against us."

Though she was approaching 100 years of age, she would never talk about the actual number. Every day of her life was a blessing from God, and she always encouraged others to be thankful for every breath.

During the last two weeks of her life, Auntie Nellie became very weak, and her food intake was minimized, which took a toll on her stability and ability to stand on her feet. One thing the family is very thankful for is that she did not suffer physical pain. She went to be with the Lord on September 29 at 3:10 am, peacefully. May God rest her soul and give peace and comfort to all the family members and friends from near and far.

Romans 14:8 "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord."

**Mrs. Nellie Morad was the beloved aunt of Assyrian Foundation of America member and Education/Scholarship Board Member, Mr. Jack Chaharbakshi. Nellie was the only sister of Jack's father.*

IN MEMORY OF
ROBERT SARGIS SHOMON*

FEBRUARY 19, 1934 – MARCH 26, 2023

Robert Sargis Shomon was born to Sargis and Hazel Shomon, in 1934 in Chicago, Illinois. Soon after graduating from high school, he joined the United States Army for two years. After the Vietnam war, due to the army's limited budget, he was released from active duty. Robert moved to Florida to search for the career of his dreams in the sunshine state. Although successful with his Florida venture, Robert decided to return to Chicago to be close to his mother Hazel and his sister Marylene. Robert believed in higher education, and since he was great with numbers and keeping track of records, he decided to study accounting at DePaul University in Chicago. While working full time, he began his education in 1971, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Commerce in 1977, followed by many certificates obtained while practicing accounting in multiple firms. He completed his Master of Science in Computer Information Systems in 1983, followed by a certificate of National Information Systems Auditor in the same year. Robert wanted to become a Certified Public Accountant. Knowing that he needed more education, he went back to DePaul University and completed his Master of Business Administration (MBA) with a concentration in Accounting and graduated in 1988. Later, his credential earned him a Certificate to Public Accountancy in 3 States: Illinois, California, and Nevada. He also earned many memberships to the National Society of Accountancy from 2000 to 2008. In 1979, he was elected and employed by the Security Exchange Commission as a Senior auditor of the Federal Tax Program for large corporations.



In 1976, Klementine Latchin came to U.S. to visit her mother's uncle Alex and his family in Chicago. Uncle Alex was married to Hazel Shomon, Robert's mother. During her stay in Chicago, Robert would visit his mother and sister, every Sunday. On one of those Sundays, Robert met Klementine for the first time at Uncle Alex's house and fell in love with her. She appreciated him as a handsome and well-educated Christian. After her visit ended, she returned to Iran to arrange her retirement as a school principal. In 1978, she returned to the U.S., and within two weeks of her arrival, Robert proposed, and she accepted. They were married on August 5th, 1978, in Chicago. Despite all of life's challenges, they lived in Chicago for 29 years until Robert retired. During their marriage and retirement, they travelled to 25 countries taking thousands of pictures to memorialize their enjoyable time together.

Robert ended his career after 15 years with the SEC, and 18 years with other financial institutions, finally retiring in 2007, at the age of 70. After his retirement, he continued providing tax advice and preparation services to a few business entities, as well as some personal friends and family members.

Both Robert and Klementine enjoyed being around their Assyrian friends and community. After his retirement, they decided to move West, where the weather was more pleasant than Chicago. Since some of their friends had moved to Las Vegas NV, they decided to do the same in 2008.

Sadly, six years ago, Robert was diagnosed with Parkinson disease. Though it was weak at the beginning, it got worse with time. During all these years, his wife, Klementine, took care of him, met his physical, emotional, and mental needs. Like many have witnessed, she would prepare his favorite meals, help him with sitting, walking, sleeping, and medications. Over the last year, Robert had several falls, requiring his wife to lift him up on her own. During the last two weeks of his life, Robert's condition worsened, making mobility and food-intake extremely difficult. Robert passed peacefully, without any pain, on March 26, 2023.

May God rest his soul and give peace and comfort to Robert's wife, Klementine, as well as to extended family and friends.

Romans 14:8 "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord."

**Mr. Robert Sargis Shomon was the beloved husband of Klementine, aunt of Assyrian Foundation of America member and Education/Scholarship Board Member, Mr. Jack Chaharbakshi. Klementine Latchin Shomon is the sister of Jack's mother.*

Jason Tamou Nurturing Assyrian Culture Through Media and Activism



Introduction:

Jason Tamou, a London-born Assyrian media activist, has emerged as a passionate advocate for his Assyrian heritage. His journey from a disconnected youth to a dedicated activist has been shaped by his experiences, particularly his transformative trip to Iraq. Through his social media platform, Assyrian Appreciation, and the Gabarra Podcast, which he co-hosts with his friend Fadi Mansour, Jason strives to connect Assyrians with their culture and amplify their voices in the diaspora.

Finding Inspiration:

Growing up in the vibrant and Assyrian-filled neighborhood of Ealing in London, Jason's connection to his Assyrian heritage was deeply rooted in his surroundings. He spent his formative years immersed in the rich tapestry of his community, with the heart of it all being his active involvement in the church and the youth group. It was within these hallowed walls that he nurtured his passion and love for his Assyrian heritage.

His parents' unwavering commitment to the church and community had a profound influence on him. They instilled in him a strong sense of identity and a deep appreciation for Assyrian traditions and values. As a young boy, he eagerly participated in church activities, celebrations, and cultural events that kept the Assyrian spirit alive in his home.

However, as he transitioned into his teenage years, he began to grapple with a sense of disconnection. He found himself facing a different reality outside the close-knit Assyrian community that had shaped his early years. The Assyrian presence in his school was minimal, and he longed for the camaraderie and shared cultural experiences that had defined his childhood. It was during this period of self-discovery that his journey into Assyrian activism took an unexpected turn. While he felt disconnected, he never stopped caring for his community and actively looked for sources of inspiration to reignite his passion. He sought ways to bridge the gap between his Assyrian heritage and the multicultural world outside.

One of the most surprising sources of inspiration came through an unexpected avenue: football. The universal appeal of the sport drew him in, and through his involvement in local football activities, he began to form connections with Assyrians from diverse backgrounds.

As he grew older, Jason's passion for his community never waned. He actively sought out sources of inspiration and looked for ways to rekindle his connection to his Assyrian roots. He yearned for a deeper understanding of his heritage and a renewed sense of belonging within the larger Assyrian diaspora. It was as an adult, through his journey with Gishru, that he found the true essence of his connection to his community and his people. Gishru, the organization that focuses on connecting Assyrian youth with their homeland, played a pivotal role in bringing him closer to his community and his heritage. His experiences with Gishru allowed him to rediscover the profound importance of preserving and celebrating his Assyrian identity, a journey that would ultimately lead him to become a passionate advocate for his people.

A Transformative Trip to Iraq:

Back in March and April of 2022, Jason embarked on a profound journey with Gishru that would forever alter his perspective on his Assyrian heritage and ignite his passion for activism. His transformative trip to Iraq, the ancestral

homeland of the Assyrian people, was a life-changing experience that opened his mind to a multitude of cultural, historical, and contemporary dimensions.

His journey began with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. He had heard countless stories about Iraq's tumultuous history and the challenges faced by Assyrian communities in the region. Yet, a deep yearning to connect with his roots and gain a firsthand understanding of his heritage propelled him forward.

As he set foot on the land that had long held a place in his heart, Jason was immediately immersed in the rich tapestry of Assyrian culture and history. The sights, sounds, and stories of the homeland enveloped him, and he felt an overwhelming sense of belonging that he had never experienced before.

One of the most striking aspects of his trip was the warm and hospitable nature of the Assyrian people he encountered. The genuine warmth and kindness extended to him left an indelible mark on his heart. He was welcomed with open arms into Assyrian homes, where he shared meals, stories, and laughter with families who had endured hardships yet remained resilient and proud of their heritage.

The visit to Assyrian historical sites and ancient ruins deepened his appreciation for the enduring legacy of his people. Standing amidst the remnants of ancient Assyrian civilizations, he felt a profound connection to his ancestors and a responsibility to preserve their memory.

But it was the celebration of the Assyrian New Year, Akitu, that truly brought his journey to life. Surrounded by the vibrant festivities and joyous gatherings, he felt an overwhelming sense of cultural reawakening. The music, dancing, and colorful traditional attire filled him with pride and a profound sense of belonging. The celebration was a poignant reminder of the resilience and unwavering spirit of the Assyrian people, who continue to uphold their rich traditions even in the face of adversity.

However, what truly stirred his soul was his interaction with the Assyrian youth in Iraq. These young individuals, despite facing numerous challenges, displayed an unwavering commitment to their cultural identity and a thirst for knowledge. He was deeply moved by their resilience and their determination to learn multiple languages, including Assyrian, Arabic, English, and Kurdish, to navigate the complexities of their environment.

Witnessing the capabilities of these young Assyrians left him both inspired and heartbroken. He was inspired by their eagerness to excel academically and culturally, but he was also saddened by the limited opportunities available to them. Their aspirations were often hindered by a lack of resources, access to quality education, and economic stability.

Throughout his journey, he visited numerous cities, each with its own unique blend of history and contemporary life. He met Assyrians from various walks of life, and these encounters left an indelible mark on him. From the bustling streets of Ankawa to the serene villages of the homeland, his travels introduced him to a diverse array of people, each with their own stories and perspectives.

This experience was a turning point for Jason. It opened his eyes to the stark disparities between the Assyrian diaspora and the homeland. It ignited a fervent desire to contribute to the betterment of Assyrian communities in Iraq and to raise awareness of the challenges they face. He returned from Iraq with a newfound sense of purpose and a commitment to be actively involved in Assyrian activism. His journey of rediscovery had not only reconnected him with his heritage but had also ignited a passion to make a difference in the lives of his fellow Assyrians.





Assyrian Appreciation - A Platform for Change

In November 2022, Jason embarked on a new chapter of his journey by launching "Assyrian Appreciation," a remarkable social media platform that would become a beacon for Assyrians and those curious about their culture. This digital endeavor was born out of a desire to educate and engage others on the intricacies of Assyrian culture, history, and contemporary challenges. Frustrated by the overwhelming nature of existing organizations, He envisioned a more accessible and relatable platform that could effectively reach a broader audience.

Assyrian Appreciation quickly became a dynamic space where he could channel his passion and creativity. His vision was clear: to make Assyrian culture approachable and engaging for everyone. He wanted to break down the barriers that often-made Assyrian culture seem inscrutable to outsiders and, at times, overwhelming to those within the community.

What set Assyrian Appreciation apart was his unique approach. Rather than adopting a solemn or academic tone, he infused his content with humor, relatability, and a sense of everyday life. By using humor as a bridge, he managed to connect with his audience on a personal level, making the complex and often weighty topics of Assyrian history and identity more accessible. Through Assyrian Appreciation, he tackled a wide range of subjects, from explaining the intricacies of Assyrian cuisine and traditional dances to shedding light on the challenges faced by Assyrian communities around the world. His engaging and informative videos provided viewers with insights into the vibrant tapestry of Assyrian life, past and present.

One of the standout features of Assyrian Appreciation was its ability to foster a sense of community and belonging. Assyrians and non-Assyrians alike found a welcoming space where they could learn, laugh, and share in the celebration of Assyrian heritage. The platform became a digital bridge, connecting people from different corners of the world who shared a common interest in understanding and appreciating Assyrian culture.

As Assyrian Appreciation rapidly gained popularity, his impact on the Assyrian diaspora and beyond became increasingly evident. His unique blend of humor, relatability, and educational content resonated with a diverse audience. Assyrians found themselves not only entertained but also enlightened about their own culture, while non-Assyrians gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for the rich tapestry of Assyrian heritage.

The success of Assyrian Appreciation demonstrated the power of using social media as a tool for cultural preservation and education. Jason's dedication to breaking down barriers and making Assyrian culture more relatable was a testament to his commitment to his community and his desire to ensure that Assyrian heritage continued to thrive in the digital age.

The Gabarra Podcast - Navigating Assyrian Identity

Jason's commitment to preserving and celebrating Assyrian culture extends beyond social media. In collaboration with his friend Fadi Mansour, he co-hosts the engaging and thought-provoking "Gabarra Podcast." The word Gabarra translates to "strong man" or "mighty man" mainly used as a term of respect; while the feminine version is Gabartah. This podcast serves as a powerful platform for connecting diaspora Assyrians with their rich cultural heritage and addressing the complex challenges of maintaining their identity while navigating the Western world.

The podcast's mission is succinctly encapsulated by a quote from Fadi Mansour, Jason's co-host: "Shlamalokhon, my name is Fadi, and I am the co-host and co-founder of the Gabarra Podcast. The passion project connecting diaspora



Assyrians with their culture and sharing thoughts and ideas on the struggles of being Assyrian and navigating the Western world as nukhraye in our current country of residence. The project was birthed after a visit to Atra, where a prominent figure in our community challenged me to communicate my experiences and feelings to the wider community on what it is to be a Suraya. A swift conversation later with Jason, my co-host, an idea was born. You'll find that we probably laugh at ourselves more than discuss hard-hitting topics, we try though..."

The genesis of this inspiring podcast idea was an unexpected discovery during a seemingly random night at the DDK Hotel in Duhok, Iraq, also known as Nohadra. This chance encounter illuminated the path for Jason and Fadi to create a platform where they could openly discuss the complexities of being Assyrian in the diaspora, share their personal experiences, and invite their audience to join in meaningful conversations. The Gabarra Podcast has since become a vital space for exploring the multifaceted aspects of Assyrian identity, culture, and the challenges faced by the Assyrian community in the Western world.

Motivating Through Social Media and Building Bridges

Jason is not just a content creator; he is a motivator and bridge-builder within the Assyrian community. Through platforms like Assyrian Appreciation and the Gabarra Podcast, he aims to inspire young Assyrians to take an active role in positively impacting their community. He encourages them not to be intimidated by starting their own initiatives and emphasizes the importance of following their hearts while staying connected to their heritage.

His journey, from a place of disconnection to becoming a prominent advocate, serves as a testament to the transformative power of passion and dedication. He believes that every Assyrian has the potential to make a meaningful impact, regardless of where they are in the world.

One of the key tools in this mission is the power of social media. He recognizes its profound influence in helping Assyrians stay connected to their heritage. He encourages Assyrians worldwide to actively engage with various digital platforms and connect with as many members of the Assyrian diaspora as possible. In his eyes, social media serves as a bridge that transcends geographical boundaries, allowing the global Assyrian community to unite, share stories, and discuss current issues.

For Jason, it's not just about passive consumption of content but active participation and engagement. He underscores the importance of sharing personal narratives, shedding light on pressing concerns, and fostering a sense of unity within the diaspora. Social media becomes a dynamic stage where Assyrians can celebrate their culture, educate others, and amplify their collective voice.

In this digital age, he firmly believes that every like, share, comment, and post holds the potential to make a difference. It is through these digital connections and conversations that the Assyrian community can continue to thrive, adapt, and preserve its rich cultural heritage for generations to come.

Conclusion:

Jason's journey from a disconnected youth to a dedicated Assyrian activist is a testament to the transformative power of personal experiences. Through platforms like Assyrian Appreciation and the Gabarra Podcast, he is actively working to connect Assyrians with their culture and amplify their voices in the diaspora. His dedication and passion serve as an inspiration to others who seek to make a positive impact within the Assyrian community.



A Brief Foreword by Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.

July 24, 2023, marked the 100-year anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in Switzerland, an agreement that signified the formal conclusion of World War I. Ultimately, the treaty defined the boundaries of the post-Ottoman state of Turkey and many modern nations within the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Moreover, by signing the treaty, all the “Great Powers” effectively abandoned promises of protection and autonomy made to minority communities, among them the Assyrians.

The Treaty of Lausanne - The Assyrian Tragedy

by Professor Emeritus Joseph Yacoub

*Translated from French to English by
Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.*

The political character of autonomy for non-Muslims has been completely eliminated. () Once again, the powers yielded to the sensitivities of the Turks, discovering attacks on their sovereignty in the simple desire of the powers to have a more complete guarantee regarding the application of measures relating to the protection of minorities.

André- N. Mandelstam, 1931

Preamble

Why is the Treaty of Lausanne of interest to Assyrians?

It concerns them for three main reasons: their status in Turkey, the return to Hakkari of mountain Assyrians and the fixing of the border with Iraq in connection with the *vilayet* (old Ottoman term denoting a province or governate) of Mosul. During the negotiations from November 1922 to July 24, 1923, the Assyro-Chaldean question was prominently present; it was widely debated and took on an international dimension. What was the content? Which countries spoke? What was the role of the Minority Sub-Committee set up for this purpose by the Conference? Have their delegates been heard? What were the results?

Known in Turkey under several denominations: Chaldeans, Nestorians, Assyrians, Syriacs, they have lived on this land for over 3000 years. They bitterly suffered the effects of this treaty in several areas (refusal of their return to their country, denial of their rights, persecutions, closures of churches, mass exodus to Syria and Lebanon).

On this question there are main sources: *The Yellow Book* devoted to this Conference (the minutes of which are very instructive), the archives of the Holy See (the Vatican), the Assyro-Chaldeo-Syriac documents in Aramaic and in other languages, the writings of specialists (in particular André Mandelstam, Basile Nikitine, Louis Le Fur), and an abundant British literature.

This presentation is divided into five axes.

1. The tenor of the discussions at the Lausanne Conference on the Assyrians. Support from allied countries, rejection by Turkey.

Upon reading *The Yellow Book*, one sees that the delegates of the respective states discussed the conditions and status of the Assyrian-Chaldeans in Turkey, the question of minorities and the fixing of the border between Turkey and Iraq.

During the session of December 12, 1922, Lord Curzon (1859-1925), head of British diplomacy (Foreign Office), chairman of the first commission of the Lausanne Conference, that of territorial and military questions, took the floor, as well as Mr. Barrère for France, the Marquis Garroni for Italy, and Ismet Pasha, representative of Turkey.

Lord Curzon's introductory talk was entirely devoted to the issue of minorities, in which he referred to the Assyrian problem. “One of the objectives which the Allies set themselves when they were drawn into the war, was the protection and, if possible, the liberation of the Christian minorities existing in considerable numbers in Asia Minor. This was particularly the case in relation to Armenia. He argued for equal treatment of Christian and Muslim minorities and said he was in favor of considering the fate of Constantinople Christians, Nestorian Assyrians, and Armenians.

On the Assyrians he declares: “There is also the group of Nestorian Christians or Assyro-Chaldeans who inhabit different parts of the mountains of Kurdistan and on the Turkish-Persian border. Great Britain, France, and America, in particular, are very interested in the fate of this people who have suffered terribly from the carnage and the ruins of the recent war. As he is now settled in an area under British influence, he is sure of our friendly protection. We must insist, on the other hand, that the Nestorians who remain in Turkish territory benefit from suitable measures, capable of safeguarding their religion, their activity, and their life.”

He was supported by his French and Italian colleagues: Mr. Barrère and the Marquis Garroni. The representative of France declared: "The principles which we are happy to see modern Turkey claiming must, in practice, assure minorities of religion, language and race, security, freedom and equality of rights which are the common good of all the inhabitants of the same country. He continues: "In the presentation that I submitted to you, I did not

want to name anyone by those who are entitled to the protection of all the powers which hold as sacred respect for their existence, their material and moral interests., of their rights to be treated on an equal footing with all citizens of the Turkish Empire. I regard them all as equally deserving of the powerful interest they inspire in us. »

Ismet Pasha, representative of Turkey, responds on December 13 to Lord Curzon's proposals. In his speech he evokes the "minorities" in these terms: "Turkey has, neither in its eastern provinces nor in Cilicia, not an inch of territory which does not contain a Turkish majority, and which can be detached, from n any way, from the motherland. He refuses the idea of a territorial home. About the Assyrians who live in Eastern Anatolia, he declares without naming the regions in question: "The Nestorians and Assyrians living on the eastern border of Turkey never made any complaint until the general war, during which they neither have they had to endure any particular suffering; there is no doubt that the return of peace will allow them to renew excellent relations with their compatriots. »

Is he pretending to forget the majority Assyrian and Kurdish Hakkari? Does he really know this region? It is curious, as if the massacres of Mardin, Diyarbakir, Bitlis, and Séert had not taken place!

2. During the debates on the status of minorities, how did the representatives of the Allies react to the Assyrians and what was Turkey's position?

A sub-committee on minorities was set up for this purpose within the first committee on territorial and military questions, and its chairmanship was entrusted to Raphaël Montagna, representative of Italy.

During the session of January 6, 1923, we attended several interventions: Sir Horace Rumbold, Mr. de Lacroix and Riza Nour.

R. Montagna addressed on January 7, 1923, to Lord Curzon, as president of the first commission, a letter in which he evokes the resolved questions and the unresolved questions on the minorities. The delegates of the sub-committee, although the Turkish delegation refused to attend this hearing, did not think they could refuse to receive the representatives of certain ethnic groups and to hear their demands: Armenia, Assyro-Chaldea, Bulgaria, and the representatives of the committee of emigrants from the two Thracians.

Among the unresolved questions, states Raphael Montagna, are indeed the Assyro-Chaldeans. He writes: “It will also be necessary to examine with the same spirit of fairness and consideration for the peaceful existence of the ethnic minorities, the question of the Assyrian-Chaldeans, who in their turn addressed the Conference. It is also a question of giving this population the possibility of meeting in a special locality and leading a peaceful life there under the protection of the Turkish government, which should itself guarantee to the Assyro-Chaldeans, with special provisions for local character, the possibility of preserving their traditions. However, the Turkish delegation opposed "absolutely and clearly, an end of inadmissibility to all the questions which were put to it, as well about the Armenians as about the Assyro-Chaldeans and the Bulgarian populations ”.

For his part, Sir Horace Rumbold (UK) says, quoting their places of view by name: “I would like to add a few words about the Assyrians either Nestorian or Catholic. This brave little people,

who before the Great War inhabited the towns and villages scattered between Mardin and Diyarbakir and the Turkish-Persian border (particularly in the mountains around Djoulamerk) and beyond this border in Persia, suffered cruelly during the war, was scattered everywhere, and suffered great losses in men. After describing their dispersal and suffering, he addressed this appeal to the Turkish authorities: "In the name of all those, I appeal to the Turkish Delegation, in the hope that the Turkish government will facilitate their return and grant them all the necessary guarantees that they keep their language and their schools, preserve their individual family customs, practice their religion and live peacefully as peaceful citizens of Turkey. And to conclude: "I must add that the fate of the Assyrians has aroused great interest in foreign countries, especially in my own, in France, in Italy, and in the United States, because of their history and their religion.”

Mr. de Lacroix declares for his part, on behalf of France: "The Assyrian-Chaldean representatives have asked for the possibility of being able to resume the course of a peaceful and customary life including in particular the free use of their language and their religion. in a land where the nucleus of their race has been fixed since time immemorial. In the same spirit, the French Delegation can only recommend these modest wishes and ask the Turkish Delegation for a favorable response. »

In fact, all the European delegates pleaded for satisfactory living conditions for minorities and the interest in keeping these populations qualified as educated, industrious and hardworking.

At the sitting of January 9, 1923, under the chairmanship of Lord Curzon, the delegates heard a report from the Minorities Sub-Committee, presented by R. Montagna. The same day, Lord Curzon presented a report and submitted some general considerations to the Turkish delegation. After having spoken of the Armenians, he approached that of the Assyro-Chaldeans: "The group of Assyro-Chaldeans is small in number, but because of its race, its history, its religion and its sufferings, it excites more interest in the world than any other community of equal size. This people is scattered in all directions; it was driven by the war from its habitat in Turkey and Persia. A certain number of Assyro-Chaldeans are more or less under British protection, on the borders of Iraq. England's interest in them is not purely platonic, as it has spent more than £4 million supporting them since the armistice. A large number of Assyro-Chaldeans either find themselves in Turkish territory or wish to return to their homeland, in Turkish territory, in the region of Djoulamerk.”

"The British Government," he continued, "will make every effort in favor of the Assyrian-Chaldeans inhabiting the territory under its influence, as well as in favor of those who are already in Turkey or who propose to return there. I hope the Turkish government will give them full guarantees regarding their language, schools, customs, and religion.”

He concluded by expressing the hope that the points on which a divergence remained would be the subject of an “amicable agreement” and that the Turkish delegation would be good enough to examine some of the considerations which he had just submitted to it.

3. Assyrian claims presented to the Conference. Desire to return to Hakkari and live with the Kurds. The position of Surma Khanum.

Assyrian leaders who came to Lausanne addressed the Conference and were received by the leaders. A delegation presented their

demands on December 4, 1922, and January 1, 1923, on behalf of the Assyro-Chaldean National Council, created in April 1920 in Istanbul by several personalities, led by Dr. Jean Zebouni. Victor Yonan, Saïd Namik, Nedjib Rustem, Habib Abbosh, Abdel-Karim Pasha and Malik Cambar were among them; Agha Patros was also present in Lausanne. They asked to be heard by the Conference and were received by the Minorities Sub-Committee.

Addressing the question of Mosul, they expressed their hostility to Turkish pretensions and Arab domination (notes of December 4, 1922, and January 1, 1923) and asserted their right to Mosul for historical and ethnic reasons, as the cradle of Assur and of Nineveh. General Agha Petros also sent a Memorandum to the conference secretariat on November 20, 1922, in which he reproaches Turkey for its intransigence, which considers the province of Mosul as Turkish, facing England which denies Turkish claims.

All say they are in favor of an Assyro-Chaldean autonomous state. About the Assyrians of Hakkari, who were driven out of their bi-millennium habitat by the Turks in 1915, one affirms their will to want to return to live there: "The Assyro-Chaldeans were independent before the war. In the mountains north of Mosul, before the war they were completely independent. They had their own legislation and administration. They had their national chiefs or *maleks*. They had their codes of laws or *sunhadous*. They paid no tax to the government of Constantinople. Never had a Turkish soldier dared to enter their home. This the Turks know only too well. "And to add bitterly: "And it is today that we proclaim so loudly the principles of freedom, justice and self-determination that of a free people, we are going to make a people of slaves! »

Surma Khanum (1883-1975), a great Assyrian figure, originally from Hakkari, reiterates the same desire to want to live there with the Kurds. On these links she writes: "With the Kurds, it's different; they have been our neighbors for a long time, and it's like I said, if it was for the intrigues of the Turks that they were used against us, I don't think our old friendship would be broken for something that it may be, but these are simple quarrels."¹

Still concerning these links with the Kurds, we read in the Assyro-Chaldean documents: "They (the Kurds) claim today to constitute with their Assyro-Chaldean brothers an autonomous State. They accept to be confederated with the State of Iraq and they reject with the greatest energy any idea of a return to Turkey and any fragmentation or amputation of the territory of Mosul. The slightest rectification of the frontier would take away hundreds of Assyro-Chaldean villages from us and expose them to nameless cruelties on the part of the Turks. We hope that the conference will not allow such injustice."

4. Fixing the border between Turkey and Iraq. Question postponed. What impact on the Assyrians?

During the conference, the border between Turkey and Iraq remained undetermined, the Turks having asked for the return of the *vilayet* of Mosul, which was refused by the British delegation. The Treaty decided that this border would be determined amicably between Turkey and Great Britain within nine months, and that, in the absence of agreement between the two governments within the time limit, the dispute would be brought before the Council of the League of Nations (CLN).

Moreover, Turkey was keen to keep the Hakkari for strategic

reasons. She manages to claim it and refuses to allow the Assyrian Mountain refugees, forced to settle in Iraq in August 1918, to return to their native home. The issue of Mosul and Hakkari will ultimately be referred to the League. Hakkari will be definitively abandoned to Turkey and the province of Mosul given to Iraq.

As for the territorial border between Turkey and Syria, it was fixed under article 8 of the Franco-Turkish agreement of Angora (October 20, 1921) which was very advantageous for Turkey. The localities of Nisibis and Djizire-ibn-Omar will remain with Turkey.

During the session of January 23, 1923, Ismet Pasha set out in his presentation the reasons why Turkey could not consent to the cession to another power of the *vilayet* of Mosul. Speaking of ethnographic reasons, giving some information on the different elements constituting the population of this *vilayet* and on their distribution, he comes to speak of the Assyro-Chaldeans: "The Christians found in the regions in question are mainly the Nestorians, the Assyrians and Chaldeans. The former, during the invasion of the *vilayet* of Van by the armies of Tsarist Russia, acted treacherously and so cruelly towards their Muslim compatriots, with whom they had lived in peace for centuries, that they thought they had to leave with the Russians during their retreat. As for the Chaldeans and especially the Assyrians of the *vilayet* of Diyarbakir, they have never allowed themselves to be influenced by stimuli from outside and they continue to live in perfect harmony with their Turkish compatriots."

But historical facts and realities belie the words of Ismet Pasha.

Lord Curzon's response

In response to Ismet Pasha on the Christians and the Assyrian-Chaldeans, Lord Curzon made this rejoinder, having in mind the Assyrians of the Hakkari who had fled their ancestral and immemorial mountains during the massacres of 1915 and who took refuge in Iraq under protection British, after three years spent nomadic in Iran: "And the Christians? Ismet Pasha was talking about the question of the communities formed by Christians, Assyrians, and Nestorians, on the borders of Mosul, more than 60,000. Do they want to be delivered to Angora? Not a day goes by that I don't receive letters calling on me to save them from this fate. At the beginning of the war, they fled by the thousands from Turkish territory, moving away from Djoulamerk and other places, and they spread to the plains of Mesopotamia, where the British government had to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling to provide for their upkeep. Gradually we got to have them established in the northern regions of the *vilayet* of Mosul where they are now preparing to defend themselves by raising soldiers. And against whom are they thus defending themselves? Not against the Brits who put them where they are. Not against the Arabs, who have no bellicose intentions; it is against the Turks that they defend themselves because they fear an attack on their part. And Lord Curzon concludes firmly with these words: "And these are the people whom I am invited, in a friendly spirit, to hand over to the Turkish delegation".

In conclusion, we can say that, with the Turkish delegation, these were antagonisms of an irreducible nature.

5. What do the archives of the Holy See say about the Assyro-Chaldeans in Lausanne and about the consequences of the Conference?

On this subject, the Vatican archives shed new light and are undoubtedly a key source, including on their living conditions in Turkey. Bishop Luigi Maglione (1877-1944), then Apostolic Nuncio in Bern, Switzerland, followed the work of the conference and transmitted reports to Rome, specifically to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, Secretary of State of the Holy See.

Italy was also active. We learn that on January 30, 1923, Baron Monti, Director General of Worship Affairs at the Italian Ministry of the Interior, sent a letter to Cardinal P. Gasparri which contains a report on the work of the Minorities Sub-Commission of the Lausanne Conference.

These documents from the Holy See are particularly revealing regarding the restrictions and sufferings inflicted on Christians in Turkey during this period. Moreover, these texts provide a formal denial of the declarations of the Turkish delegates at the Lausanne conference.

After the massacres of 1915-1918, Hakkari was left with nothing but its name, as well as the whole *vilayet* of Van. While we were discussing at the Lausanne Conference, Assyro-Chaldean-Syriac Christians abandoning their possessions and leaving their homes, marched *en masse*, seized with panic, in the direction of Syria (Djezireh, Aleppo, Homs, etc.), Iraq and Lebanon, and abroad, from 1922. This last date corresponds to the day after the Franco-Turkish agreement of Angora, signed on October 20, 1921, which fixed the border between Turkey and Syria representative. And this movement was to paradoxically increase after July 24, 1923, the birth date of the Republic of Turkey.

On this alarming situation, we have numerous testimonies from Joseph Naayem, Isaac Armalé, Gorek de Kerboran, Malek Cambar, Suleiman Sabbagh, Israel Audo, and the various Syriac Churches.

In a report by Mgr. Berré, apostolic delegate in Mesopotamia, sent from Mosul on December 3, 1922, to Cardinal Tacci, secretary of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, he mentions news, described as disturbing, coming precisely from the regions of Mardin and Diyarbakir, where the Christians would be expelled *en masse* by the Turks and ordered to head for Syria. Bishop Suleyman Sabbagh, then Chaldean bishop of the diocese of Diyarbakir, and Israel Audo, bishop of the diocese of Mardin, were put on notice to leave their dioceses. In this report, we read that these two bishops would have requested authorization to go to Mosul, their country of origin, but the Ottoman authorities would have refused them this permission, saying that this city was soon to be occupied by Turkish troops, these prelates would again be expelled from it, like all the Assyro-Chaldeans of this country. We learn that the British authorities in Iraq have brought together the spiritual leaders of the various Christian communities and recommended that they set up committees to prepare accommodation and collect relief for Christians in the Diyarbakir and Mardin regions who might go towards Mosul after being expelled by the Turks.

Other reports corroborate these facts about the bishoprics of Mardin and Diyarbakir such as the letter of April 4, 1923, from the Chaldean Patriarch Emmanuel II Thomas and that of Bishop Israel

Audo of Mardin on December 30, 1926. Moreover, the villages of Tur 'Abdin were inhabited by a majority of Syriac Orthodox, were again attacked by the Turks in 1926.

The following letter is very revealing of the general climate that prevailed after the proclamation of the Turkish Republic on July 24, 1923. Suleiman Kutchuk Ousta, who was the Chaldean Vicar in Diyarbakir, wrote the following on November 5, 1929, from the city of Deir-ez-Zor to his patriarch in Baghdad, Emmanuel II Thomas: "The Chaldean people who, like the Armenians, had endured the horrible events of 1915, were not the least decimated of Eastern Christendom. Entire dioceses, with their pastors and their clergy, fell prey to Turkish and Islamic fanaticism, and watered with their blood the soil of this East which had once again become a country of martyrs. The two dioceses of Diyarbakir and Mardin are found today scattered in the different localities and cities of Syria, Iraq and even Egypt, France, and America. And to add: "The persecution slowed down after the armistice of 1918, resumed with a vengeance, the day after the formation of the Turkish Republic of Angora. It rages there slowly but continuously, systematically, and decisively; it is led there by skillful hands and determined to go all the way."²

Conclusion

Three years after the Treaty of Sèvres, the Treaty of Lausanne annihilated the ethnic and political autonomy of nationalities and minorities. Between the Allies and Turkey, there were irreconcilable antagonisms throughout the Conference. Turkey systematically denied Armenians, Assyrians-Chaldeans, and Kurds the right to concentrate in a particular locality and rejected any idea of a home or territorial shelter. And the Allied Powers made successive abandonments, from Sèvres to Lausanne, yielding to the demands of Turkey.

At most, section III of the Treaty of Lausanne, entitled "Protection of minorities", deals in its articles 37 to 45 with the rights of the non-Muslim populations of Turkey, which will be signed, moreover, without too much conviction by the Turkish delegation. These provisions relating to the protection of "minorities" repeated those already mentioned in other post-war international treaties, ignoring the provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres. However, over the years, these same rights have undergone successive alterations.

I will end with this bitterly lucid quote from André Mandelstam, an informed observer of the turbulent events of this period of Eastern history, who was Professor at the Academy of International Law in The Hague: "The Treaty of Lausanne ensured no autonomy or protection, neither to the Kurds, nor to the Assyro-Chaldeans, nor even to the Armenians whose Treaty of Sèvres proclaimed complete independence.

Translation note : The term Assyro-Chaldéen (herein translated as Assyro-Chaldean) is used in French to denote individuals who are of Assyrian descent, regardless of their religious affiliations.

² Georges-Henri Ruyssen, SJ (a cura di), *La Questione Caldea e Assyra (1908-1938)*, T. II, Valore Italiano et Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome, 2019, pp. 1400-1405.

³ *La protection internationale des droits de l'homme*, Recueil des cours de l'Académie de droit international de La Haye, 1931, p. 132.

¹ In 2014, Kurds inaugurated a public park in the town of Hakkari, naming it after Surma Khanum.

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