

2000 Years of Massacres

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Introduction

Our Christian people, including Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs, have endured an unparalleled length of persecution throughout history. For two millennia, this population has been subject to various forms of persecution, despite changes in governance within the region known as Mesopotamia, modern-day Iraq. Since the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC, followed by Babylon in 539 BC, the area has been governed by a diverse array of entities, including the Median, Macedonian, Parthian, Sassanid, and Muslim Arab regimes. Additionally, the Umayyads, Abbasids, and Ottomans have all presided over the region, with the latter responsible for the most severe massacres committed against our Christian people. These atrocities have given rise to the underlying issues that have led to massacres in 1914, 1933, 1968, and, most recently, 2014.

The advent of Christianity in our country can be traced back to the first century, introduced through the city of Ruha (modern-day Urfa in Turkey). Our forefathers quickly embraced the faith, seeking solace during times of subjugation under foreign rule. The establishment of the Church of the East followed which grew to encompass a vast region extending from the Middle East to China.

The early Christian church faced severe persecution at the hands of the Romans until 313 CE. It was only after Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the country that the persecution against Christians ceased.

However, in the eastern region of the country, which was ruled by the Sassanid State, Christians were persecuted due to their expansion into the kingdom. This was due to the belief of Zoroastrian clerics that their religion was under threat from Christianity.

While the Roman and Sasanian kingdoms were in a state of constant warfare, the Roman Empire provided support to the Christians. This led the Sasanians to believe that all Christians within their borders were Roman spies, resulting in an intensification of persecutions and oppression against them. This reached its peak during the reign of King Shapur II, lasting for forty years, until his death in 379, which came to be known as the 40th persecution.

As a result of the persecution suffered under the Sassanids, Christians in the region welcomed the arrival of Muslim Arabs in the first half of the 7th century as they worshiped the same God. However, the Bedouin Arabs found the region's religion of tolerance, fertile land, and high civilization to be a valuable and easy target. Over time, the sword and the Jizya (tribute) reduced the numbers of these people, turning them into a weak minority. For instance, the number of Jizya payers, who paid tribute to the Muslim rulers, was in millions at the beginning of Islam in 640 CE but dwindled to no more than 14 thousand in the time of the Abbasids in 750 CE.[1].

Since the arrival of Islam in the seventh century, the region has been governed by different Muslim peoples, such as Arab, Mongolian, Persian, and Turkish. These groups have considered non-Muslims as infidels, who should be converted to Islam or killed. The Muslim people have viewed killing non-Muslims as a form of Jihad for the sake of God.

[1] The Assyrians After the Fall of Nineveh/5th -page 9 –9 الاشوريون بعد سقوط نينوى \ المجلد الخامس صفحة

Over the course of 2000 years, our ancestors endured varying degrees of persecution, depending on the time. Many were killed, while others converted to Islam, assimilating into the local Arab, Kurdish, Turkish, and Persian populations, abandoning their language and forgetting their origins.

Faith in Christianity

Faith in Christianity was embraced by our ancestors due to various reasons during the Persian rule:

- Firstly, they found solace in the religion's message of tolerance amidst the injustices perpetrated by the rulers.
- Secondly, the Aramaic language used by the missionaries was relatable to the locals.
- Additionally, the stories of the Old Testament resonated with their ancient civilization.

The first Church in our country was established in Al-Madain (Ctesiphon and Seleucia), located south of Baghdad, and was a unified entity until sectarian divisions caused a split in the fifth century. The split resulted in two distinct churches:

- the Chaldean and Assyrian Eastern Church, also known as Nestorians, and
- the Syriac Western Church, also known as Jacobites.

The Eastern Church expanded its reach to the East, developing its administration and spreading its influence to Central Asia, India, and ultimately China and Indonesia between the 7th and 13th centuries. As a result, the number of followers of the Eastern Church grew to 80 million[2].

In the 16th century, the Eastern Church underwent a division resulting in the formation of the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church. Approximately 50 years ago, the Assyrian Church experienced another split, giving rise to two distinct factions. Similarly, in 1662, the Western Church was divided into two sections, both carrying the Syriac name. Rather than coming together as a single entity, each group further divided, leading to the existence of five churches today: the Assyrian, Chaldean, Old Eastern Assyrian, Catholic Syriac, and Orthodox Syriac.

Christianity has been present in Mesopotamia for two millennia, encountering periods of both ease and hardship based on the political landscape and the nature of Persian or Arab Muslim rulers. With the exception of the Al-Hirah kings and some small emirates in the north, there has been no Christian ruler who has governed any part of Iraq. During brief stretches of religious freedom, churches were reconstructed, and ceremonies were conducted without impediment. However, Christians have faced bloody periods where priests and their congregants were forced to renounce their faith, losing access to their historical records and valuable church property. Few incidents in history have been as catastrophic for them as these[3].

[2] Bishop George Garmo – Chaldo and Athor, 2nd Edition – مطران كوركيس كرمو - مقدمة الطبعة الثانية من الجزء الثاني لكتاب كلدو واثور

[3] Religions and Sects in Iraq – page 145 -145 الاديان والمذاهب بالعراق – صفحة

The First World War

1. During the reign of the Ottoman Empire from 1512 to 1918, our people were divided into three sections based on their geographical location in relation to the centers of government authorities. The first section lived in areas where the government was located and was directly subject to its laws, making it the dependent section.
2. The second section was semi-independent, using the government when needed, and was subject to some government laws.
3. The third section, the Hakkari region, was independent and not reached by government forces due to its location in mountainous terrain and was connected to the government by the patriarch[4]. Today, this region is located in southeastern Turkey near the Iraqi border and is adjacent to Persia (Iran).

The Hakkari area is 13,000 square kilometers (8.1 square miles) and its surface is mountainous and rugged from the east to the west. The government only collected annual taxes from this area. This section plays a role in the First World War. On July 2, 1840, the British consul in Erzurum wrote to the Foreign Ministry of his country, "The Christian population is a solid element, a working people and a perseverance. They have preserved their distinct personality from Islam. They have preserved their country, their money, and their rights by force of arms and are jealous of their freedom. On July 27, 1840, he says, "This district is completely closed to the Turks[5]."

Before the outbreak of the First World War, about 100,000 Assyrians lived in this region, independent of the oppression of Muslims, as their brothers always faced in the plains. Their administrations were subject to the heads of their tribes; known as "Malik," meaning king, and each tribe had its own president. These areas were surrounded by many Kurdish tribes that were always in conflict and battle with one another, but all joined together in their hostility towards the Christians. Consequently, the inhabitants of these areas had to take up arms and defend themselves and their possessions.

Following the outbreak of the war, Christians expressed a lack of confidence in Turkish rule and anticipated its downfall. The Turkish authorities detained several individuals who were residing outside their mountainous homeland, including the younger brother of Mar Shimon, the patriarch, who was pursuing studies in Constantinople (Istanbul)[6].

During periods of Ottoman strength, our people suffered cruelly under their rule. However, during times of weakness, the Ottomans allowed European missionaries to enter, who focused solely on preaching Christianity to Christian populations and contributed to the ongoing division of our Eastern Church into various factions. This division has persisted to the present day, causing continued suffering.

Regarding the Christian communities in the dependent and semi-autonomous sections, the Ottoman Empire launched bloody campaigns with the intent to completely eliminate them through an organized plan. A report from the German ambassador in Istanbul to Berlin on August 2, 1915, revealed that the

[4] The Assyrian History, page 31 –31 تاريخ الاشوريين – صفحة

[5] The Assyrians after the fall of Nineveh/5th -page 179 –179 الاشوريون بعد سقوط نينوى \ المجلد الخامس صفحة

[6] Do Must This Nation Die? Page 163 –163 هل يجب ان تموت هذه الامة صحفة

Turkish government was preparing to eradicate all of its Christian citizens in the eastern provinces of the country. This was carried out in strict accordance with the systematic method programmed by the Koran [7], the slaughter must be followed with meticulous precision according to the systematic method is programmed as follows: Groups of people, particularly the elderly, were arrested and taken to unknown locations, where they were divided into groups of 50 or 100 people. They were then stripped, slaughtered, and thrown into deep wells. The perpetrators swore an oath on the Koran to keep the matter a secret from the Christians[8].

Father Boutros Abed from Cairo submitted a report on April 18, 1918, summarizing the events that took place in these two sections. The report stated that a million and a half Christians were killed in the massacres committed in Mesopotamia by Arabs, Circassians, and Kurds at the instigation of Rashid Bayh and Wali Diyarbakir and Mosul in the early months of 1915. The report also detailed the results of his inquiries, which revealed that the Christians of the Basra region would not have survived the carnage that the sheikh of Muntfik was preparing for, had it not been for the arrival of British troops.

In the aftermath of the war, the Christian population faced significant hardships. In Baghdad, a three-year reign of terror was endured, with several high-ranking members being executed and many more being deported to other regions. While Mosul faced harassment and violence, the people were spared from the worst of the massacres that occurred elsewhere. The Aljazeera region, however, was not as fortunate. Almost the entire population, save for a small group of 500 who sought refuge in the mountains, fell victim to the carnage. Turkish soldiers similarly decimated the Christian population of Siirt and carried out mass destruction in dozens of Chaldean villages, with no survivors to speak of. Tragically, Bishop Mar Addai Scher was among those killed in Siirt.

In Diyarbakir, the local authorities apprehended approximately 100 families, along with clergymen, and brought them to the Tigris River where they were fatally shot. Meanwhile, other Christi **Bishop Mar Addai Scher**
mercilessly massacred between the cities of Mardin and Diyarbakir. In the Myapharkin parish, which boasted a population of six thousand individuals, nearly all of its members were brutally slaughtered, and their church was razed. Only one priest was fortunate enough to escape. The Mardin parish underwent the most severe persecution, and despite some managing to flee, the successive massacres decimated the community. Similar atrocities were perpetrated in Zakho, Amadiya, and Aqrah[9].

Regarding our people in Hakkari, the independent section, their circumstances were distinct. Despite being outnumbered, they were able to defend themselves in battles. On several occasions, they found themselves surrounded by enemies on all fronts. In 1849, Patriarch Mar Shimon wrote to the British consul, highlighting the rape of people in 376 villages over the past three decades. The letter also noted that Sultan Abdul Hamid was responsible for the deaths of between 300 and 350 thousand Christians in 1895, as well as the killings of five thousand of our people in Mardin and Ruha, and the displacement of numerous families. The Sultan's rule favored the Kurds, who were expected to support his reign[10]. Despite the brutal massacre of 10,000 individuals by Badr Khan Al-Kurdi in 1847, the Sultan continued to arm and equip the Kurds and ignored their oppressive actions.

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[7] Christians Between the Monsters Fangs – page 322 -322 المسيحيون بين أنياب الوحوش – صفحة

[8] Christians Between The Monsters Fangs – page 342 -342 المسيحيون بين أنياب الوحوش – صفحة

[9] Christians Between The Monsters Fangs – page 413 -413 المسيحيون بين أنياب الوحوش – صفحة

[10] The wounded Soul - page 460 -460 الذات الجريحة - صفحة

Map depicting Assyrian relocation after Seyfo in 1914

Overall, the Sultan's actions gave the Kurds reason to believe they were a privileged class. This led to increased unrest throughout the mountains and the attacks on Christian Assyrians, who had no chance to save or protect themselves, was a tragedy for all involved[11].

In November of 1914, a declaration of jihad was proclaimed against the adversaries of Islam, which was sanctioned by the Ottoman Sheikh of Islam. The Turkish authorities transported weaponry to the borders of Iran and provided arms to the Kurds in July of 1914. Subsequently, in August of that year, the Kurds launched an attack led by Turkish forces, who disguised themselves as Assyrian villagers in Iran[12].

n the year 1915, the Union and Progress Movement Association adopted the slogan "Kill, Burn, Destroy" as its motto, with its three leaders being:

1. Talaat, the Minister of Interior and Chairman of the ruling Union and Progress Party.
2. Anwar, the Chief of Staff and Defense Minister, and
3. Jamal, the Governor of Istanbul and the Minister of Maritime Affairs.

In February 15, 1915, the High Court issued orders to discharge Christians from the army and confiscate their weapons. These actions were part of a policy aimed at eradicating the Christian presence in the country. On April 24, 1915, the Seferberlik decree was issued, mandating the deportation of Christians from the country. These events occurred prior to the decision of this segment of our population to participate in the unavoidable war.

In summary, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Christians comprised one-fifth of Turkey's present-day population of four and a half million, but only 10,000 of them remain today [13].

The Varieties of Torments

While the Europeans were inventing ships, trains, telegraphs, printing presses, medicines and other types of science and art, the Turks invented the means of torture against the infidels. Here is a model of the torture methods they practiced against the Christians as reported by eyewitnesses:

They gathered the children in the wilderness and set up firewood on top of them and it was just like Babylon’s furnace set by King Nebuchadnezzar and burned them up. Others dropped them down in the valley and they rode horses and ran over the bodies. They put others under the train cars, so the train was able to go over them and trampled them. They released wild dogs on the children and tore their flesh and ate them. Other children were throwing in the lit hay and burned them. Others were tied with huge wood and cut their bodies from the top to toe. Somewhere burned with cautery and then peeled their skin with chisel. Burned the ears, crooked noses, pulled nails, and cut feet and forced them to walk to die.

[11] Our Little Ally – page 14 –14 صفحة – حليفنا الصغير

[12] The Assyrian History, page 45 –45 صفحة – تاريخ الاشوريين

[13] History of The Eastern Church – page 466 –466 صفحة- تاريخ كنيسة المشرق

The perpetrators of these atrocities would extract the mustaches and eyebrows of their victims and then proceed to kill them by stabbing them with daggers. The desire for material wealth motivated these criminals to dig into the bellies of their victims in search of gold and other valuables. They slaughtered people indiscriminately and even consumed their blood. The flesh of certain individuals was stripped from their bones and left as prey for birds of prey. The perpetrators went so far as to slaughter people in trenches or throw them into wells. In an act of unspeakable cruelty, children were even thrown from high places onto their own mothers. The elderly were left in remote areas to die of starvation and thirst. Young virgin girls were subjected to a particularly gruesome fate, being thrown into holes, and stoned until half of their bodies were destroyed. These individuals were then abandoned to their inevitable fate. Some victims had their eyes gouged out and their teeth removed. The perpetrators also employed arson as a tool of destruction, throwing wood into homes and setting them ablaze. Butchers were hired and compensated with one lira (Turkey's currency) for each Christian they slaughtered. The victims were then summoned one by one to have their necks cut, thereby meeting their end.[14].

The War Consequences

In 1914, the Ottoman Empire aligned itself with Germany against the Allies in World War I. The residents of the Hakkari region, as subjects of the Ottoman Empire, did not possess the option of remaining neutral in the conflict. The state's policies, which were marked by violence and instability, rendered neutrality impractical. The Empire was on the brink of collapse, and the strength of the Allies and their Christian faith portended a better future for the people who had suffered under Islamic oppression for thirteen centuries.

Against this backdrop, the residents of Hakkari chose to ally themselves with the Allies on June 1, 1915, encouraged by Russia's support. However, during the ensuing battles, the Russian forces abruptly withdrew from the region, leaving the Assyrian people to face the Ottoman army alone during the attack on the Caucasus. This withdrawal occurred at the start of 1915 and resulted in the displacement of around 25,000 Assyrians, many of whom perished, including elders and children, during their harrowing journey[15].

Great Britain made a commitment to support the Assyrian people and aid them in their continued resistance. The Assyrians were compelled to accept this offer, as rejection would have resulted in their complete annihilation. However, Britain failed to fulfill its promises, and the aid did not materialize. This led to the migration of the Assyrian people from their homeland in a tragic journey through Iran and Iraq, during which half of them were lost to the attacks of their enemies who ambushed them on the road and subjected women to sexual slavery.

The Assyrians of Hakkari were forced to abandon their land and property and relocate to a camp near the town of Baqubah in Iraq. To this day, the Assyrian people maintain their demands for the restoration of their historical areas, or if not possible, another suitable location. Their demands include a return to pre-war conditions without requiring any concessions from the war. Several attempts were made to return to their ancestral lands but were met with opposition from the Turks. These efforts continued until the border between Turkey and Iraq was finally established in 1926, with the Assyrian areas now within the Turkish border. Despite this setback, there remained hope for the Assyrian people

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[14] Failure in Christians Crises - pages 113 and 114 - 114 القصارى في نكبات النصارى - صفحة

[15] The Assyrian History, page 47 –47 تاريخ الاشوريين – صفحة

to return to their homeland, with promises of settlement in areas adjacent to the newly formed Iraqi state's borders.

The Settlement Problem of the Assyrians

The Assyrians of Hakkari joined the Allies in a bid to extricate themselves from Ottoman control. Unfortunately, their decision resulted in severe hardships for the community. With the withdrawal of the Russian army, they found themselves surrounded by hostile enemies on all fronts. Faced with the prospect of mass annihilation, they were forced to abandon their ancestral lands in Hakkari and seek refuge in areas protected by British forces in Iraq, a journey fraught with danger and uncertainty.

Subsequently, on August 10, 1920, during peace negotiations, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed with Turkish authorities. Notably, Article 62 of the treaty stipulated the importance of providing comprehensive safeguards to protect Assyrians-Chaldeans in both Turkey and Iraq.

The agreement stipulates that Turkey is obligated to offer facilities for non-Turks to return to their homeland and compensate them for their losses[16]. During discussions with Turkey on the issue of Mosul, Britain raised the matter of the Assyrians displaced from Hakkari and deemed their return to their original areas north of the border line as a prerequisite for resolving the conflict. However, Turkey firmly rejected this proposal. Consequently, Britain demanded the annexation of a Hakkari region to Iraq to facilitate the return of the Assyrians.

With the Assyrians insistent on returning to their areas and Turkey refusing to comply, Britain exploited the dire conditions of the Assyrian refugees to pressure them to abandon their demands to return to their country. In exchange, the British and Iraqi governments pledged to provide housing for them among the other Assyrians in areas of northern Iraq, south of the Brussels line. Both Britain and Iraq cited the housing of Assyrians in the state of Mosul and the granting of the religious privileges they enjoyed in the Ottoman Empire as reasons for annexing Mosul to Iraq[17].

After Iraq became a member of The League of Nations, the president of The League of Nations stated in a session that Iraq had signed an agreement obligating it to provide protection for national minorities. In another session, all parties agreed that the only solution to this issue was to unite the Assyrians into a single group. This formula eventually evolved into homogeneous groups or parts, enabling the Iraqi government to subjugate them individually among the Arabs and Kurds who were hostile to them. This, in turn, led to their displacement and annihilation. The Iraqi government supported various methods of distributing them to different groups[18].

The Issue of The Mosul City

In late November 1918, the ceasefire marking the end of the First World War expired, and the British army advanced northwards from Basra into the region, ultimately reaching the Al-Shirqat area approximately 100 kilometers south of Mosul City. The British forces did not halt their progress at Al-Shirqat, but rather continued to push forward to Mosul City after the ceasefire had concluded.

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[16] The Assyrians and the Assyrian Case – page 120 -- 120- صفحة - الاشوريون والمسألة الاشورية

[17] The Assyrians in The Politics and The Contemporary History – page 116 -116 الاشوريون في السياسة والتاريخ المعاصر

[18] The Assyrians in The Politics and The Contemporary History الاشوريون في السياسة والتاريخ المعاصر

Meanwhile, Turkey, as the heir to the Ottoman Empire, sought to maintain its dominance in the region and demanded control over the Mosul Brigade, as it had been occupied after the ceasefire. However, at the Lausanne Conference on November 20, 1922.

During the conference, the discussion between the English delegate, Lord Curzon, and the Turkish delegate, Ismat Pasha, centered on the city of Mosul. The Turkish delegation sought to incorporate the city into the new Turkish map, while the English delegation opposed this request and ultimately rejected it.[19].

The mandate of Mosul held significant importance due to the persistent Turkish demand for its annexation. The region boasted expansive petroleum fields that promised a prosperous future for the British[20] . However, negotiations reached an impasse when Britain raised the issue of the return of Assyrians to their historical territories in the Hakkari province, which Turkey staunchly opposed. As a result, Britain proposed redrawing the border to include the Hakkari area within the Iraqi state, which was met with Turkish refusal. This proved to be the final attempt at resolving the issue of resettlement in Northern Iraq, specifically in the regions of Dohuk, Zakho, and Amadiya [21].

In December of 1925, the Council of the League of Nations finalized its decision to establish the border demarcation between Turkey and Iraq, resulting in the shared jurisdiction of the mandate of Mosul between the two nations. The British government viewed this as an endorsement of the resolution previously passed by the Council in Brussels on October 19th, 1924, [22].

Therefore, the League of Nations concluded its involvement in the matter, resulting in the division of the land encompassing the ancestral home of the Assyrians between two states: the newly established State of Turkey and the State of Iraq. The provisional border established in Brussels was solidified as the definitive demarcation between the two nations. The determination of the Mosul issue was driven by geographical, strategic, economic, and international factors, without due regard for the interests of the native populace, including the Christian minorities [23].

The Iraqi Government Issue

Iraq's admission to the League of Nations took place on October 3, 1932. During the deliberations, the Iraqi representative emphasized that the Assyrian community would be permitted to settle in substantial groups, with a foreign inspector tasked with overseeing this process [24]. However, this assurance was quickly undermined by the authorities in Baghdad, who took measures to disperse the Assyrian populace. Instead of making serious attempts to resettle them in an appropriate location suitable to their social circumstances, the opposite outcome was achieved. The Assyrian community was subjected to efforts aimed at weakening and forcibly relocating them from place to place [25].

With the conclusion of the British Mandate, Iraq was accepted as a member of the League of Nations. Regrettably, none of the assurances extended to the Assyrian community during their participation in

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[19] Agha Petros – page 236 –236 اغا بطرس – صفحة

[20] Lady Surma, page 206 –206 سورما خانم صحفة

[21] Lady Surma, page 206 –206 سورما خانم صحفة

[22] Lady Surma, page 222 –222 سورما خانم صحفة

[23] Lady Surma, page 222 –222 سورما خانم صحفة

[24] The Assyrians and the Assyrian Case – page 134 -134 الاشوريون والمسألة الاشورية

[25] Lady Surma, page 250 –250 سورما خانم صحفة

the war by the Allies were honored. The Assyrian populace was acutely aware of the perilous state of affairs. On September 3rd, Patriarch Mar Shimon Ishai declared that their community was at risk of annihilation from the face of the earth in the future [26].

In 1930, the Iraqi government signed a treaty with Britain that acknowledged the country's independence and the cessation of the British Mandate. During these negotiations, the Christian minority groups submitted a petition to the League of Nations, requesting their support in safeguarding their rights prior to the British withdrawal[27].Unfortunately, some provisions of this treaty caused consternation among the Iraqi people, newspapers, and members of the House of Representatives and Dignitaries, who strongly opposed it. Prime Minister Nuri Al-Said was a particular target of this backlash. Notably, the National Fraternity Party, led by Yassin al-Hashemi, Rashid Ali Al-Gailani, and Hikmat Sulayman, were among the most vocal opponents [28].

The Iraqi people were greatly dismayed to learn that Rashid Al-Gailani had accepted King Faisal's proposal to form a ministry led by him in March 1933. This decision was met with severe criticism from his party and allies, especially given that the new ministry recognized the 1930 Treaty, and its primary architect, Nuri Al-Said, was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs [29]. The acceptance of the two parties to work together on the basis of this treaty caused astonishment and condemnation among the public, many of whom were staunchly opposed to it [30].

At the time, there was a notable increase in popular resentment against the ministry, particularly in Shiite areas. The publication of the book, "Arabism in the Balance," which criticized Shiite origins, further fueled resentment and agitation. There were suspicions that the Prime Minister himself was involved in the matter, given his known sectarian extremism and Sunni animosity towards Shiites. The book gained popularity among Sunnis, who became more entrenched in their old Sunni-Shiite disputes as a result.

The disagreement escalated beyond mere vocal protest and demonstrations, as serious acts of violence erupted. A group of individuals from Najaf launched an attack on a government weapons depot, resulting in the release of prisoners. Meanwhile, certain Shiite brigades in the south remained isolated from the Interior Ministry in Baghdad, pushing the country to the brink of civil war. These events further weakened the government's position, leading to increased fear of being overthrown and the inability to address matters through both persuasion and force.

Instead of adhering to democratic principles and requesting Al-Gailani to resign and allow for a new government to take his place, he resorted to deceitful tactics. In order to divert public attention away from their demands and the government's inability to find solutions, he sought to create a crisis, even if it required inventing it. This approach aimed to exploit patriotic and zealous sentiments among the public to distract them from their problems and demands [31].

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[26] History of The Eastern Church – page 259 –259 تاريخ كنيسة المشرق- صفحة

[27] History of The Eastern Church – page 258 –258 تاريخ كنيسة المشرق- صفحة

[28] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 92 -92 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث

[29] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 92 -92 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث

[30] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 91 -91 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث

[31] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 94 - 94 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث

The Amadiya's Secret Meeting and Determination of Demands

After 14 years of unfulfilled promises to house the Assyrians despite the existence of the British mandate, concerns were raised about their future once the Iraqi government gained control after independence under the 1930 Treaty. In response, a comprehensive meeting was convened on June 15 and 16, 1932, attended by Mar Shimon and other religious and non-religious leaders, where several resolutions were adopted. These included:

1. Recognizing the Assyrians as the original people of Iraq and not a minority of a racial or religious sect.
2. The necessity of returning their homelands in Turkey to Iraq. If this is not achieved, a homeland for the Assyrians in Iraq will be found, including Dohuk, Amadiya, Aqrah and Zakho, with its headquarters in Dohuk, and it is run by an Arab administrator and assisted by a British consultant
3. A committee should be established to find suitable and enough land with the necessary funds.
4. The Iraqi government should formally recognize the religious and non-religious powers of Mar Shimon.
5. At least one Assyrian representative in the Iraqi parliament.
6. The resigning officers (from the Levies Army) continue to resign until the official response to their demands[32].

It is noteworthy to mention that members of the Assyrian community within the Levies forces, which were composed of various factions of the Iraqi populace and established by the British, have collectively resigned in protest of the British-Iraqi agreement. The reason for their dissent stems from Britain's failure to fulfill their commitment to provide new housing for the Assyrians. In an effort to rectify the situation, the English Ambassador sought the assistance of the Patriarch to help persuade the soldiers and officers to return to their barracks. The Patriarch was promised that the English Ambassador would take all necessary measures to support the Assyrian people, including representing them in the League of Nations, finding a resolution to the Hakkari region, and preventing the downsizing of the Assyrian and other battalions. With the influence of the Patriarch, the Assyrians resumed service for a period of six months. However, the English Ambassador failed to fulfill his promises and went as far as obstructing the Assyrians' return to Hakkari using his authority [33].

The Weakest Link

Following Al-Gailani's appointment as Prime Minister, he did not retract his position but instead devised a plan to restore his popularity. However, he was confronted with three pressing issues, namely the Shiites, Kurds, and Assyrians. Amongst these groups, he identified the Assyrians as a weaker link that he could potentially unite against for various reasons:

1. According to Arab claims, the Assyrians are considered foreigners as they were brought to this land by the English. Al-Gailani, in an effort to gauge the sentiments of the Iraqi populace towards the English government and to what extent they harbor animosity towards them,

[32] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 94 -94 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث

[33] The Assyrians and the Assyrian Case – page 136 -136 الاشوريون والمسألة الاشورية

conducted an investigation into this matter. Furthermore, he sought to refute the opposition's accusations of his alliance with the English government and his support for the 1930 Treaty [34].

2. The Assyrians' demand for lands belonging to others has instigated conflict with the Kurds, creating further tension between the two groups.
3. Due to their Christian faith, the Assyrians are viewed as infidels by Muslims, leading to an increase in hostility towards them.
4. The Assyrians are a Christian sect amongst many others.
5. The Assyrian community is plagued by internal divisions..

It was perceived that the Assyrians were a vulnerable target as neither Sunnis nor Shiites, Arabs nor Kurds, national parties, nor even other Christian sects showed sympathy towards them. In May 1933, an order was given by Al-Gailani to re-register licensed Assyrian rifles for collection. Subsequently, newspapers and mosque preachers initiated a campaign to rid the country of the Assyrians and save it from the "infidels". Approximately two-thirds of the Iraqi forces were concentrated in the region, with 1,500 Arabs and Kurds armed for the mission. The Kurdish officer Bakr Sidqi, known for his hostility towards the Assyrians, was assigned to command the army in the area and viewed it as an opportunity to seek revenge against them [35].

On the Kurdish-Assyrian front, the government aimed to create discord between the two groups, exploiting the Kurds' animosity towards the Arabs to turn it against the Assyrians. This divisive tactic aimed to weaken both groups and consolidate the principle of divide and conquer. The government sought to downplay the severity of the attacks against the Assyrians and generate a certain impression that it was not a significant problem [36].

The government's propaganda succeeded in deceiving the public and instigating hatred towards the Assyrians, with the masses becoming increasingly enthusiastic and demanding the government to take more decisive action. These campaigns intensified whenever the government felt vulnerable, creating a psychological and mental atmosphere conducive to accepting an armed clash with the Assyrians as a means of overcoming the challenges it faced [37].

The Battles

Mar Shimon, the leader of the Assyrian people, was subjected to intense scrutiny and monitoring by the Iraqi government, who kept a close eye on his actions and movements. Furthermore, the government prevented him from meeting with tribal leaders, further limiting his influence [38].

In late May 1933, Interior Minister Hikmat Sulayman extended an invitation to Mar Shimon to discuss the issue of housing. Mar Shimon accepted the invitation in the hopes that the meeting would alleviate tensions and restore confidence among the people, provided that the negotiations were conducted with respect and without arrogance. However, Minister Sulayman, with his royal and Turkish Ottoman

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[34] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 97 -97 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث
[35] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 165 -165 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث
[36] The British Betrayal of The Assyrians – part 2: page 84 -84 الخيانة البريطانية للأشوريين ج2 ص
[37] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 97 - 97 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث
[38] Lady Surma, page 253 – 253 سورما خانم صحفة

background, narrow-mindedness, and rigid demeanor, proved unsuitable for the task. The meeting ultimately failed, and this was the government's intended outcome [39].

Due to Mar Shimon's refusal to agree to Sulayman's conditions, including the request to sign a prepared pledge, the minister detained him in Baghdad and placed him under house arrest, ignoring orders from King Faisal, who was recuperating in a Swiss hospital, to release Mar Shimon.

With his Ottoman Turkish background, Interior Minister Hikmat Sulayman (1880-1964) saw an opportunity to exact revenge against the survivors of the First World War. He summoned Mar Shimon to Baghdad not for the purpose of understanding and negotiation, but to issue orders and demand obedience. When he found that Mar Shimon was not submissive and had instead responded with a famous letter in which he refused to sign a pledge that would compromise his dignity and reputation, Mr. Sulayman took offense. Despite Mar Shimon's attempts to discuss his words and demands, Mr. Sulayman deemed it an insult to himself and the state, and subsequently decided to arrest him in Baghdad [40].

In Mosul, the Agent of the Conductor, Khalil Azmi, called for a meeting to reconcile the supporters and opponents of Mar Shimon. During the meeting, a housing project for 200 families, and according to some sources, 360 families in Dashtazi in the Amadiya district, was presented. While some agreed to the project, others demanded the return of Mar Shimon for consultation. The government gave the final ultimatum to either accept the project or leave the country. On June 14, a group of 1000 to 1350 men left Iraq and crossed the river to Syria [41], which was under French control, leaving their families behind. Before their departure, they sent a letter to the Minister of the Interior, signed by various tribal leaders, on July 23:

“Given that one of the main objectives of the meeting in Mosul was to obtain clarification on the Iraqi government's stance regarding the proposed settlement project and the Patriarch's position, it was explicitly stated by the Agent of the Conductor that those who were not in favor of the project had the option to leave the country immediately. As a result, we have decided to leave the country. Our intention is not to engage in any form of conflict or hostility unless it becomes absolutely necessary[42].”

In Syria, the Assyrians encountered many challenges due to the Iraqi Syrian agreements as well as the French-British arrangements. Consequently, they decided to return to Iraq to reunite with their families. However, as the Iraqi army was stationed on the Iraqi side of the river, specifically in Dayrabun, only a small group managed to cross the river and return safely on August 5. On August 7, a larger group crossed the river, but the Iraqi forces stationed in the area opened fire on them, leading to a 20-hour battle. The aftermath of this battle was devastating, as 95 villages were destroyed and 66 were burned down. As a result, the Assyrian people commemorate this day, August 8, each year to honor and remember the Assyrian martyrs.

On August 8, Iraqi pilots dropped leaflets calling on the Assyrians to surrender their weapons and gather in the village of Sumel, which was located 10 miles from Dohuk. Some families responded to the call and went to Sumel. On August 11, the Arab residents left the village, and the Iraqi soldiers

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[39] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 111 -111 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث

[40] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 269 -269 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث صفحة

[41] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 155 -155 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث

[42] The British Betrayal of The Assyrians – part 2: page 110 -110 الخيانة البريطانية للأشوريين ج2 ص

arrived in Sumel on military trucks to carry out the planned massacres. Initially, all adult men were executed, followed by all males from ten years and older. After the massacre of the men and males, the murderers entered the houses and ransacked them, stealing what they could and committing acts of rape and murder against many women. In the afternoon, the army withdrew and allowed Arab and Kurdish tribes to pillage Christian villages and commit further acts of rape against women[43].

The Iraqi government issued a decree to set a price of one dinar for the head of an Assyrian, marking a new low in the atrocities committed against them. The village of Sumel became the site of the most heinous acts, with artillery shells raining down indiscriminately on both government supporters and opponents. Children were flung into the air and impaled on bayonets, while priests were brutally murdered and had their genitals mutilated. Women were forced to walk naked in the aftermath of the attack. The unspeakable horrors of the massacre were documented in a report by a British adviser who was working for the Iraqi government, who stated that the events in Sumel were beyond comprehension, even for someone who had witnessed the atrocities of the World War [44].

The clerics were taken out and crucified on crosses naked after being seen with their bodies, and chroniclers of this tragedy told that women were forced to tear off their clothes and be naked in front of the Iraqi military commander. Girls as young as nine-year-old were raped and burned alive after scattering The Bible on their bodies and many women were forced to drink the water which was contaminated with the blood of martyrs whose bodies were thrown in[45].

After the massacre, the army kidnapped the girls on their return and took hundreds of prisoners who were killed on the road, claiming they had been released on the way home. The few who were killed by the army or by others are not just individuals or dozens of people, but tens, hundreds and even a few thousand people according to some narrations[46].

Thus, the ruling elite in Iraq, which had been imbued with the Ottoman military tendency to achieve what was impossible for their Ottoman masters in the total elimination of this people[47], as they also failed to eliminate the militants and poured their anger on the women, children, and the unarmed elders by expressing their desires to bury and eliminate this peaceful and ancient people.

The Celebrations

On August 7th, the Iraqi government held an official ceremony to commemorate their success, despite ongoing reports of violent atrocities. The media had prepared the public for the forthcoming celebration of Victory Day, with arches decorated with flags and flowers. During the event, a watermelon was raised on bayonets to symbolize the beheading of the Assyrians, amidst a decree that mandated complimentary coffee and shaving services for three days in honor of the occasion. In recognition of his contributions, Bakr Sidqi (1890-1937), an Iraqi General of Kurdish descent, was promoted to the rank of Major and received the honorary title of "Pasha" by various news outlets.

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[43] Lady Surma, page 256 –256 سورما خانم صحفة

[44] The Assyrians in The Politics and The Contemporary History – page 92 -92 الاشوريون في السياسة والتاريخ المعاصر

[45] August 7th – The Assyrian Martyr's Day – page 18-18 السابع من اب يوم الشهيد الاشوري

[46] Footnotes on Iraq's Modern Political History – page 225 -225 هوامش على تاريخ العراق السياسي الحديث -

[47] August 7th – The Assyrian Martyr's Day – page 14-14 السابع من اب يوم الشهيد الاشوري

On August 18, the Patriarch and his entire family were exiled to Cyprus on the grounds that he was not a resident of Iraq prior to World War I. It is noteworthy that neither King Faisal I nor his son, King Ghazi, were residing in Iraq before the war, and the majority of the authority members were former Ottoman officers.

The differential treatment of the Ottoman authority towards the Assyrians, viewed as rebellious and employing foreigners, stands in contrast to their treatment of Sharif Hussein, who was regarded as leading a revolution against Turkish tyranny. Regrettably, the victorious powers saw fit to consign the Assyrians to a fate of loss of land, massacres, displacement, and the deprivation of Iraqi nationality. In contrast, Sharif Hussein was rewarded with the establishment of child kings in post-war countries, including the king of Jordan, the second king of Syria, and subsequently, the king of Iraq.

The Results

The massacres inflicted upon our people have had tragic consequences, resulting in their displacement worldwide. Any hopes of obtaining their legitimate and just rights have dwindled, leading to a continuous decline in their numbers. The harsh treatment and suppression of their demands for humanitarian rights have persisted for decades, thwarting any revolutionary spirit.

In 1961, the armed Kurdish movement in northern Iraq destroyed hundreds of Christian villages, forcing many to emigrate to Iraqi cities, particularly Baghdad. During the eight-year Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the emigration intensified, with many fleeing to the United States, Australia, Canada, and various European countries. The emigration continued through the years of the siege from 1991 to 2003 when Saddam Hussein's regime fell from power.

Subsequently, Islamic religious parties and terrorism emerged, starting with al-Qaeda, followed by ISIS. During their time, many cities and villages were emptied of their Christian population. For instance, the city of Mosul failed to ring their Christmas bells for the first time in 2000 years. The abandoned Christians were left to choose between Islam or paying tribute and displacement. They were designated to Christian homes marked with the letter " ن - N" for Nazarian, denoting followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

As a result of these acts, only a quarter of the Christian population remains in Iraq. The causes of migration persist, owing to bloody terrorism and the implementation of unjust laws against Christians, which are periodically adopted by the Iraqi parliament. Thus, the threat to non-Muslims in the country, including Christians, arises not only from ISIS terrorism but also from adherents of ISIS ideology, including those occupying decision-making positions in the country.

At the national level, the Iraqi army's involvement in politics and its use to oppress the people marked the beginning of a path that the army continued to pursue. The Iraqi army's attempts to overthrow the regime by force increased, as was witnessed in various events such as 1941, July 1958, February 1963, November 1963, and July 17 and 31 in 1968. These attempts were accompanied by numerous failed conspiracies that persisted until 2003, when the electoral system and peaceful transfer of power commenced. Nonetheless, the country remains plagued by problems such as terrorism, corruption, the predominance of power, the annexation of minority rights, and the imposition of Islamic law through force on everyone.

Massacre Survivors Eyewitnesses Real Stories

Year: 1917, Year of the Sword: Seyfo.

Location: Urmia, on the route to Hamadan.

“We have been walking for days. We fled from our lives after they pushed us out of the camp in Urmia. It feels like just yesterday when they first came to our village and cast us into the Hakkari mountains, but that was weeks ago.

I lost count of how many people I have buried between the two journeys. My daughter was one of the first to die. I think it was her heart that killed her after she witnessed what they did to her husband. They had dragged him along with most of the village men into the streets, and slied his head off as if he were s sheep ready to be slaughtered. I was carrying my granddaughter in my arms as it happened when one of them tried to take her. I overheard them saying that she would make a fit wife. I would not give her up, so he slashed my back and then stomped on my fingers.

Before they cast us out of our own village, they took my granddaughter along with hundreds more of our young girls. My granddaughter is only seven years old. I pray that she died rather than be violated by these wild savages.

Despite the painfully cold journey, we somehow made it to Urmia on foot where the Russians promised to protect us. The promise was short-lived and here we are again fleeing for our lives to Hamadan.

There are some children that are still with us, but most have died of disease or starvation. One of the little boys has a knife wound slashed across his forehead and although the infection should have killed him by now, he is somehow still alive. They say there was nearly seventy thousands of us when we left Urmia, but as I continue to bury more bodies, I fear that not one of us will live to speak of these atrocities.”

Year: 1933, Year of the Semele Massacre

Location: Semele, in route to Alqosh

“We have been walking for days. We fled for our lives after our entire village was massacred. As a child I had to cheated death in Urmia, but I hope they kill me this time around instead of forcing me to live with these memories.

A month ago, we were given notice that the Iraqi military imprisoned our bishop. We know then that trouble was coming so we secured plans to protect the women and children; however, nothing could have prepared us for what would soon happen. They began first with the men. Just like cattle, they chopped their heads off with axes and then proceeded to butcher their bodies. After making our priests watch the butchering, they dragged them to the church and burned them alive using ancient Holy Bibles as fuel.

I was one of thirty men who watched over the women and children who securely made it to the hiding place. After receiving word of the atrocities, a few of us volunteered to go rescue the people who were in the didst of the fighting.

We discreetly made our way through the village and saw horrors beyond the human imagination. The women were being forced to march naked in the streets and were raped shortly thereafter. The attack on the children was the worst. Like innocent lamb with no shepherd to protect them, they were scattered in the streets as military officials in cars ran them over.

I knew that I was only a matter of time before they found us, so I retreated back and convinced a few to flee. I still have no idea how we managed to make it out of the village alive. As we proceed walking with no hope and nowhere to go, I wonder if our people will ever have a homeland to call their own."

The Continuation of Massacres

During the first three centuries of Christianity, the Roman Empire practiced persecution, resulting in the martyrdom of numerous Christians. Meanwhile, in 226 in the East, the Zoroastrian religion managed to eliminate Persian rite rule and establish the Sassanid Persian state. As Christianity spread throughout Sassanid Persia and infiltrated various aspects of life, the Sassanids were taken aback and felt compelled to oppose this new religion, which posed a threat to their pagan beliefs [48].

Persecution of Christians in this period varied depending on the ruler and prevailing circumstances. Generally speaking, Christians residing in the Persian Empire were not subjected to violent persecution, provided that the Roman Empire condemned paganism. However, following the promulgation of the decree of Milan in 313, in which King Constantine the Great legitimized Christianity in his empire and encouraged his people to embrace it, the Persians shifted their attitude towards their Christian subjects, displaying animosity and hostility towards them. Nonetheless, the situation changed following the demise of Constantine and the ascension of King Shapur II to the throne in Persia [49].

The Christian community in Persia faced unfortunate circumstances during the reign of a monarch notorious for his harsh treatment of Christians. The monarch, referred to as Dhū l-Aktāf, which translates to "he who pierces shoulders" in Arabic, employed brutal methods of torture such as removing the shoulders of his victims while they were still alive. In 339, the monarch issued an order to eradicate the Christian population in the country, a campaign which persisted until his passing in 379.

The reign of an unjust king marked a period of persecution, commonly referred to as the "persecutions of the 40s", during which many individuals were martyred. Notably, among the casualties were Patriarch Mar Shimon Barsbai, his successor Mar Shahdust, and Mar Barbashmin. The Church of the East experienced a forty-year period without a Patriarch due to this tumultuous time. Despite the loss of many of its leaders and adherents, the Church persevered, remaining steadfast in its principles and unwavering in its faith. It demonstrated great courage in upholding lofty values and moral standards throughout this bloody ordeal. Interestingly, the very bloodshed that once plagued Persia provided fertile ground for the growth of Christianity. As soon as the persecution subsided, Christians began to reorganize and rebuild, spreading their faith with renewed vigor that even swords and spears could not quell [50].

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[48] The History of the Eastern Syriac Church – part 1 – page 21 -21 تاريخ الكنيسة السريانية الشرقية ج1 ص

[49] The History of the Eastern Syriac Church – part 1 – page 33 -33 تاريخ الكنيسة السريانية الشرقية ج1 ص

[50] The History of the Eastern Syriac Church – part 1 – page 39 -39 تاريخ الكنيسة السريانية الشرقية ج1 ص

Upon the arrival of the Muslim Arabs and their triumph over the Sassanian Persians in 637, the Christian community celebrated, as they saw them as saviors from the oppression they experienced under the Persians. Unlike the Sassanids, who worshipped fire and sun, the Muslims worshiped one God. Christians initially assisted the Muslims in various areas, but eventually realized that they were no different from other oppressors. Muslims imposed the jizya tax, forced conversions to Islam, or executed non-compliant Christians. Moreover, the Muslims repurposed well-known churches, including the Church of St. John (Yohanan) in Damascus, which became the Umayyad Mosque, and the great patriarchal church in Constantinople (Istanbul), which, under pressure from the Turkish government, transformed into a museum now known as Hagia Sophia. Over time, the Christian community dwindled to a marginalized minority.

The 1400 years of Islamic rule encompassed various eras, including the Righteous Caliphs, the Umayyad and Abbasid states, the Tatars, the Mongols, the Ottoman Empire, and the eventual formation of the Iraqi state. While these epochs differed from one another in many ways, they were consistent in their persecution of Christians, to varying degrees.

One example of such persecution occurred during the reign of the Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil (822-861). Under his rule, laws were established that forced Christians to appear different from Muslims in terms of clothing and housing. They were also prohibited from speaking ill of Muslims, the Quran, the Prophet, converts to Islam, individuals involved with Muslim women, or aiding the enemies of Islam. Additional restrictions included the prevention of persecution, reading psalms, displaying alcohol, pigs, and crosses in public, constructing buildings taller than Muslim homes, refraining from public celebrations, and abstaining from horse riding, using Islamic titles and names, and other humiliating measures.

As a result of these constant harassments, many Christians felt compelled to convert to Islam in order to free themselves from injustice and abuse.[51].

Moreover, in 850, Al-Mutawakkil issued a decree requiring Christians to carry distinguishing signs that set them apart from Muslims. They were instructed to place a small wooden figurine in the shape of a demon on their house doors to differentiate them from Muslim households. The decree also mandated the expulsion of Jewish and Christian employees. As a result of this decree, many individuals renounced their religion and embraced Islam [52].

It is noteworthy that such laws were not confined to certain rulers but rather were prevalent among them to varying degrees. Even Umar Bin Abdul Aziz (682-720), the Umayyad Caliph regarded by Muslims as the just caliph, issued directives to his subordinates regarding the treatment of the Dhimmis (Christians and Jews). In these directives, he instructed his officials to prohibit the wearing of a visible cross and to break and crush any that were seen. He also prohibited riding on a saddle with a Jew or Christian, instead requiring them to ride on a garment, and forbade traveling with their wives or female companions. Furthermore, he mandated that Christians should not wear coats or clothing made of cotton. He admonished his officials for not enforcing these rules properly and cited the abundance of camels that had been taken by Christians due to their weakness and helplessness [53].

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[51] The History of the Eastern Syriac Church – part 2 – page 174 -174 تاريخ الكنيسة السريانية الشرقية ج2 ص

[52] Christians and Muslims in Iraq – page 85 -85 مسيحيون ومسلمون في العراق

[53] The Religions and sects in Iraq – page 166 -166 الاديان والمذاهب بالعراق

Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (1138 -1193) ordered the bronze, gold-plated cross of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem to be sent to the Abbasid Caliph. The cross was subsequently buried at the entrance of Baghdad, with a visible portion left for people to desecrate by slapping it with their feet and spitting on it[54].

It is important to note the events of history that further illustrate the persecution and violence endured by Christians under various rulers. One such example is the Mongol attack in 1258 during the reign of Hulagu (1218-1265), as well as his predecessor Genghis Khan (-1227). Additionally, Nader Shah of Persia (1688-1747) and Badrakhan Kurdi killed up to 10 thousand Assyrians between 1844-1848, mutilating their bodies, including the mother of Patriarch Mar Shimon Awrahem, who was cut in half and thrown into a river. In 1918, the criminal Ismael Agha (Simko) assassinated Patriarch Mar Shimon Benyamin and all those with him. These tragic events serve as further evidence of the injustices inflicted upon Christians throughout history

Following the events of 2003, the Christian community endured significant hardships at the hands of various terrorist groups. Countless individuals were killed, including the Bishop of Mosul, Mar Faraj Rahho, and numerous priests in different locations. The communities were also forced to flee their homes, resulting in cities being emptied of Christians. One particularly horrific attack occurred on October 31, 2010, when terrorists targeted worshipers at the Church of Our Lady of Salvation in Baghdad. These events have had a lasting impact on our community, and their memory remains deeply ingrained in our collective consciousness.

Baath Party in Power

The Baath party assumed control of Iraq on July 17, 1968, initially presenting itself as a legitimate authority that granted certain freedoms and rights to its citizens. However, its approach changed drastically after 1975, when it began to implement repressive policies against those who sought to assert their rights. This included a decree that mandated individuals to identify themselves as Arabs and register as such in the 1977 census.

Despite the adverse circumstances our people faced due to the tragic Sumel massacres of 1933 and 1968, many were apprehensive about joining political parties that advocated for our rights. For many years, no Iraqi government provided our people with the necessary rights, and we were consistently relegated to a secondary status in our own land. Nevertheless, a group of enlightened and educated youth recognized the danger that threatened our existence and clandestinely formed groups of university students. These groups convened in a conference that culminated in the formation of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (Zowaa) on April 12, 1979, in Baghdad

The Zowaa made numerous attempts to engage the Iraqi government and advocate for the rights of the Assyrian-Chaldean community, but to no avail. Instead, the government intensified its pressure on Zowaa, branding it an outlaw organization and meting out punishment to anyone who expressed support for or assisted the movement.

[54] The Religions and sects in Iraq – page 178 -178 الاديان والمذاهب بالعراق

In response to the government's oppressive tactics, a group of Zowaa members abandoned their jobs, positions, and families and joined forces with other Iraqi opposition groups in the northern part of the country to engage in armed struggle. The Zowaa suffered its first casualties in 1984 when two members, Jamil Matti and Sheeba Hami, were killed defending a village that had come under attack by government forces. Subsequently, the regime arrested dozens of Zowaa members, subjecting them to harsh imprisonment, and executed three Zowaa leaders, Youbert Benyamin Shlimon, Youkhana Esho Jajo, and Yousip Toma Hermis, in February 1985. The oppressive climate persisted until 1991, when the United Nations established a safe zone in the north.

From 1991 to 2003

In the safe zone in the north of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was established following the granting of a safe zone in 1991 by the UN. In this safe zone, fair elections were held and Zowaa participated, emerging victorious with four seats out of the five allocated to the Assyrian-Chaldean people. Despite facing strong competition from three other lists, Zowaa began operating despite the limited resources available. One of its most significant achievements was the gradual return of the inhabitants of villages that had been destroyed by the Saddam regime in 1988. However, this demand was met with several challenges due to the occupation of these villages by Kurds, and the significant financial resources required for reconstruction.

In 1992, Zowaa also succeeded in establishing Syriac schools where all subjects were taught in the ancient Assyrian-Chaldean language, starting from the first grade. The program continued to progress year after year, eventually reaching the university level, where several students graduated annually with a bachelor's degree in Syriac

Furthermore, the Assyrian Democratic Movement (Zowaa) also made significant strides in promoting Assyrian-Chaldean culture and identity in North Iraq. This included the publication of newspapers and the production of radio and television programs in the Assyrian language. Additionally, the Union of Students and Youth, Women's Union, and Directorate of Syriac Culture were established to provide support for cultural and social clubs, and to recognize national events such as the New Year and Martyr's Day.

However, the achievements of Zowaa and the Assyrian people were not without cost, as many martyrs were lost in the struggle. Financial support for the schools was primarily provided by Assyrian communities abroad, particularly in the United States of America, through the Assyrian Aid Society. The society was established in 1992, after the Kurdish government refused to pay tuition and salaries for teachers at Syriac schools. The Assyrian Aid Society provided funding for all aspects of the schools, including books, teachers, security, and transportation for students living far from the school.

From 2003 to 2019

Following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003, Iraq entered a new phase, which initially brought about some positive developments, such as the establishment of freedoms, constitution writing, elections, and the peaceful transfer of power. However, the pursuit of power and gains by the major powers (Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds) gave rise to rampant corruption, bombings, and assassinations. Our people were specifically targeted by terrorist organizations, as exemplified by the

attack on Our Lady of Salvation church, the assassination of Archbishop Faraj Rahho, and the 2014 assault on Mosul and the towns of Nineveh Plain, which led to the displacement of indigenous people, the destruction of churches, and the seizure of homes. In these areas, Christians were subjected to Islamic law, and forced to convert, pay tribute, or face death. The towns of Mosul, Tall Kayf, Batnay, Bakufa, Telskuf, Bakhdida, Bartella, Karemlesh, Ba'ashiqah, and Bahzani no longer rang their Christmas bells, marking the first time in 2000 years that this tradition was not upheld.

From a political standpoint, the domination of the five parliamentary seats allotted to our people in Baghdad and Erbil by larger groups has resulted in a loss of faith in these parties and a diminishing hope for our rights through democratic channels. Furthermore, dozens of individuals who were assassinated since 1991, both in Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq, have not yet been brought to justice to receive appropriate sentences. These crimes are documented as being committed by unknown perpetrators. The cumulative effect of these events, including loss of employment and a pervasive fear of the future, has led to a significant emigration of our people to northern regions and abroad.

Where the Chaldean-Assyrian Are presence now?

Throughout history, Christians have been forced to emigrate from their ancestral lands in search of safer and more stable living conditions. As they dispersed throughout the world, they sought refuge in host countries that offered safety and stability. In their historically divided country, now encompassing Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, their situation varies from country to country, despite each having an Islamic majority.

At the Congress of Lausanne, Turkey made important decisions regarding the protection of minorities and the provision of full and comprehensive protection for all inhabitants of the country, without distinction between language, race, and religion. However, Turkey did not commit to all decisions made by the League of Nations. Kurdish revolutions have caused vulnerable Christian minorities living in the region to face constant pressure to migrate in the hope of preventing the seizure of their homes, land, and property. These minorities have faced looting, rape, kidnapping of girls, and a large number of assassinations without any deterrent, leading to a new migration to more merciful locations, such as Europe, the United States, Australia, and France.

A century ago, the Christian population was 4.5 million individuals. However, instead of experiencing growth, their numbers have dwindled to only a few thousand, primarily concentrated in Istanbul. After 2000 years, the rest of Turkey, the birthplace of St. Paul the Apostle, is now almost devoid of Christians.

In Iran, following the Khomeini revolution of 1979, the country's constitution was amended to establish Islam as the official religion, with a specific emphasis on the Shiite faith. Despite this, the constitution also includes an article that acknowledges the rights of religious minorities. While the Turkish constitution is rooted in nationalism, the Iranian constitution is centered around the Islamic religion. As a result, the Chaldean-Assyrian community has been able to publish newspapers and magazines, and since the time of the Shah, they have had one representative in parliament.

Despite the recognition of religious minority rights in Iran's constitution, there is still evidence of harassment in the form of the imposition of Islamic practices such as the compulsory hijab. The

Christian community continues to reside in their historical places of habitation, with a majority concentrated in the capital city of Tehran.

The migration continues but intensified after the receipt of Mullah to power.

The dwindling number of Chaldeans-Assyrians in Iran, which was previously around 70,000 people, has decreased to less than 30,000, and most of them desire to emigrate to the United States. This unfortunate trend will soon result in the erasure of this country from the Christian map.

In Iraq, the concentration of Christians, particularly in the Mosul Brigade, which includes Nineveh and Dohuk provinces, has faced persecution throughout history like other areas. Suffering has persisted after the establishment of the Iraqi state, including the massacres of 1933, the establishment of the Republic of Iraq in 1958, and after the outbreak of the Kurdish revolution in 1961, which continued during the Baath regime in 1963 and the Arif brothers from 1963 to 1968, the Baath's return in 1968, and the capture of Saddam Hussein in 1979.

The fighting in the north has continued for years, except for periods where it was halted. Chaldeans-Assyrians villages in the combat zones were destroyed, and the population fled to the cities, especially Baghdad.

There has been a significant increase in migration to various countries due to Saddam Hussein's brutal policies and wars with Iran from 1980 to 1988, Kuwait's occupation in 1990 and liberation by the coalition forces in 1991, and the imposition of the embargo on Iraq. All of this has led to an increase in migration intensity to different countries.

After 2003, the democratic parliamentary system was instituted, controlled by the Islamic religious parties and the Kurdish nationalities, and power was shared among Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds, each with their own approach to expansion at the expense of others, particularly the vulnerable. Before 2003, the number of Christians was more than 1.5 million, but only less than half a million remain in Iraq.

The largest concentration of immigrants in the United States is in various states and cities, including the Detroit metropolitan area in Michigan as the largest gathering area, followed by Chicago, Illinois; San Diego, San Francisco; San Jose in California; and Phoenix, Arizona. Germany, Denmark, and France are also popular locations.

Chaldean-Assyrians people can be found in almost every country, and the migration trend continues due to various reasons such as political control of Islam over the rule, loss of security, lack of clarity regarding the future, and unemployment, which includes most university graduates. The question remains whether Iraq will become devoid of Christians as it appears to be the case presently?

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