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Dedication

In appreciation of their tireless efforts on behalf of this publication, we dedicate this issue of JAAS to Mr. Daniel Benjamin, the Assyrian Language Editor, and Mr. Francis Sarguis, who currently serves as our Book Reviews Editor.

Upon the creation of the Assyrian Academic Society in Chicago 1985, its then-president Dr. Edward Odisho suggested the publication of a Journal to serve as the organ of the fledgling organization. Through the one-man efforts of Dr. Odisho, a maiden issue appeared in 1985, and a second issue two years later. Dr. Odisho was limited in his effort due to lack of help and limited resources, and these first two issues reflected the situation. Their contents were short article reprints of materials previously published in books or other journals. Lacking assistance in the project, Dr. Odisho for all practical purposes had abandoned the project.

But new impetus was acquired in 1989, with the arrival of Mr. Benjamin, who joined the Journal as Editor of the Assyrian language section (a position he still holds), and Mr. Sarguis who joined as Editor of the English language (a position he held for a dozen years, before reducing his role to that of Book Reviews Editor). Thanks to their arrival at JAAS more than 20 years ago, the publication has blossomed beyond all expectation. Significant original articles have appeared both in the English and Assyrian sections. The Journal has published with regularity, and each issue is eagerly awaited by its readers, be it from our Assyrian community, or from the academic community at large. The journal is published semi-annually, and features separate Assyrian and English language sections. The content of one section does not necessarily duplicate the contents of the other section.

Aside his critical role in the life of JAAS, Mr. Benjamin is the author of a number of books. This is not surprising to those who know him. He comes from a family of writers and scholars who were active in the printing and publication of Assyrian books and other materials. He has done his part to maintain that tradition.

His contribution to JAAS goes beyond his writings and editing. For example, he has been instrumental in formatting, typesetting and overall designing of the Journal. In 1989 he introduced his software and Syriac fonts to be used in the Assyrian section. As the technology advanced, he designed a new set of Syriac fonts which could be used by public, and are in use in publishing the journal to the present time.

Throughout his tenure at JAAS, Mr. Benjamin has continued in his efforts to eliminate so-called “loan words” (foreign words which have taken deep roots in our language). He has replaced these with Classical language and Modern Assyrian syntax, and he has also translated these into English, Arabic and Farsi.
Mr. Sarguis is an attorney by profession with outstanding editorial skills. He contributed measurably to the elevation of the English section. He worked diligently to establish rapport with various scholars of Assyrian history, literature, religion, and culture. He was able to attract scholarly articles, and their appearance in the Journal consistently reflected his impeccable editing. While Mr. Sarguis found it necessary to reduce his commitment to the Journal in more recent times, he continues to provide invaluable aid by editing many of the book reviews we receive. In addition, he has occasionally contributed book reviews of his own.

In 1997, the name of our publication was changed to reflect the new realities. Our publication was no longer centered in Chicago and the relationship between editorial board and Academic society was severed earlier. The core Journal members (Mr. Benjamin, Mr. Sarguis, and Dr. Robert Paulissian) were the exclusive wardens of the JAAS editorial policy and content. To avoid or even eliminate any confusion between this Journal and the Assyrian Academic Society, our one time “Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society” became the “Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies.” Fortuitously, the acronym “JAAS” remains unchanged.

JAAS is a publication of the Fund for Modern Assyrian Studies, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. We are most grateful to Messrs. Benjamin and Sarguis for their invaluable role in making JAAS a meaningful part of our community.

Robert Paulissian, MD
Editor-In-Chief
In Memoriam

We note with deep sorrow the loss of our colleague Youel Abraham Baaba.

Mr. Baaba was born in Baghdad, Iraq, on July 23, 1930. He passed away on February 3, 2010, after a long battle with lymphoma.

After completing his primary and secondary education in Iraq, Mr. Baaba moved to the United States to pursue his studies. He went on to earn a B.Sc. from San Jose University and an MBA from Golden Gate University, San Francisco.

Mr. Baaba joined the JAAS Board of Advisors in 1997, and agreed to serve as a member of our Editorial Board in 1999. However, he was a friend to us and to our Journal long before then. A frequent contributor to this publication, Mr. Baaba’s lifelong pride in his Assyrian heritage led him to support Assyrian writers and he frequently published their works himself. Mr. Baaba was a unique talent, known for his strong convictions and his moral integrity. He leaves a proud legacy to his family, his friends, and to the Assyrian community at large. A faithful son and servant of his nation, he will be sorely missed by all.

The Editorial Board
Mene Mene, Tekel uPharsin (Daniel 5:25)
Are the Days of Jewish and Christian Neo-Aramaic Dialects Numbered?

Professor Yona Sabar, UCLA

Every region in the world has been in recent times prone to language extinction. The old cultures, with their distinct languages, complex traditions, their special ways of seeing the world, which were formed over many millennia, are showing clear signs of disintegration. While also in the past many cultures and languages disappeared mostly due to annihilation or occupation and domination by the ruling group, in modern times the process has been accelerated by some new powerful factors, as follows:

1. Modern nationalism that often imposes one national language on all ethnic groups.

Enlightenment and compulsory education for all layers of society, which usually results in:
   a. Deserting the ethnic mother tongue and adopting the national prestigious language.
   b. Mobility from rural 'ethnic' areas to the large urban centers where the national language is dominant.

3. Secularization of many societies leading to the corollary desertion of the 'traditional' indigenous language (e.g., Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish, Judeo-Arabic dialects, etc.);

4. Motorized transportation enabling thousands of people (most of whom never left their village before) in many remote and hardly accessible areas to be more mobile, moving first to large local urban centers, and from there emigrate abroad to America, Australia, etc.;

5. Forced dislocation, not to mention annihilation, of millions of 'minority' people following the two World Wars and other local wars;

6. Globalization and dominance of American/'West' popular culture on youth all over the world has had dramatic effect on many languages. In recent decades, the electronic revolution with its free flow of information

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1 On this global trend see the fine articles in Dorian 1989; and most recently, Nettle and Romaine 2000; Crystal 1997; Crystal 2000; on Jewish languages (dead or dying) see Harris 1994; Kushner (anthropological approach, in progress); Thiessen, 1973. For some exceptions and counter trends see below n. 4, and n. 16. On the meaning of any language loss for humanity, see V. Ivanov wise words: "Each language constitutes a certain model of the universe, a semiotic system of understanding the world..." as quoted in Crystal 2000:36; cf. also Chap. 3: "Lost Words/Lost Worlds" of Nettle and Romaine 2000:50-77.
transmitted by satellite dishes, videos, computers and the Internet to all
corners of the world has turned American English into a very prestigious
language, whereas the local languages are losing their prestige.²

Aramaic, a Semitic language, sister of Hebrew and Arabic, 'celebrated' in the
year 2000 three thousand years of continuous Aramaic life, beginning at a small
area in Aram or Syria of today (known by scholars as Old Aramaic), later
expanding and becoming the official language of the Assyrian and Persian
empires (known as the Imperial Aramaic), as well as the lingua franca (spoken
and even a literary language) of the entire Near East and beyond.³ For this
reason, some of the holiest Jewish and Christian texts have been originally
written and preserved in Aramaic,⁴ beginning with the biblical books of Ezra (ca.
400 BCE), and Daniel (ca. 165 BCE) which are partly written in Aramaic, and
continuing with the classical Aramaic translations of the Bible (Jewish Targum
Onkelos, etc., Christian Syriac Peshitta), and ending with the great Midrashic
and Talmudic literature (ca. 300-500 CE).⁵

² Including national languages of small countries such as Israel: Hundreds of English
words and idioms are very common in Israeli Hebrew, in spite of protests by language
purists such as 'hi' and 'bye' have replaced the native shalom for all practical purposes in
Hebrew spoken by the young. Moreover, even academic forums are often conducted in
English, and Israeli scholars, even in Jewish studies, tend to publish their work in English
rather than Hebrew in order to be part of the international community; see Schwartzwald
³ Including Southern India and China; on the latter see Saeki 1951.
⁴ Hence the great sacred prestige of Aramaic among the Jews throughout the ages; cf.
Abraham ibn-Ezra, the prominent mid-twelfth century commentator and linguist: “So, I
searched to discover which is the first of all languages. Many have said that the Aramaic
is more ancient, and that it is in the nature of man to speak it without having been taught
by anyone. Further, that if a new born child were placed in the desert with no one but a
mute wet nurse to nurse him, he would speak Aramaic” as quoted in Idel 1999: XX; cf.
also Idel’s comment: “The fact that ibn Ezra conceives of the primordial language as
being Aramaic and not Hebrew is of considerable importance.” (p. 61); and ibid., n. 15,
he mentions Talmudic and other references with somewhat similar notions. This notion
still persists today. When my son Ariel Sabar mentioned in an article in Brown’s
Alumni’s Magazine (September/October 2000, p. 80) that Aramaic is becoming an
endangered species (meaning as a spoken language), some orthodox Jewish alumnæ
reacted with reservations (quite true and gratifying to me!), e.g., ‘After surviving for
almost 3,000 years, Aramaic, like Hebrew, is likely to be around in some form for a very
long time...’ (B.M. Leiser); “I assure Mr. Sabar that Aramaic is alive and well in the
study halls of Jewish learning, where it provides a conduit for religious Jews to connect,
spiritually to their Creator in a real meaningful way. While the language may not be a
spoken one, there is no fear that it will cease to be actively used. I invite Mr. Sabar to
come to the study halls and see some of the fruits of his father’s efforts (A. Subar; no
relation) (BAM January/February 2001, pp. 8-9); cf. nn. 6, 18, below.
⁵ Even centuries later, in the 13th century in Spain, Zohar, the famous book of Jewish
mysticism, was written in Aramaic. Aramaic continued to serve (including in Eastern
The vast expansion of Aramaic was dealt a fatal blow with the Islamic conquest of the Near East in the 7th Century CE. Arabic, the language of the new religion quickly superseded Aramaic, especially in the urban areas, such as Baghdad and Damascus. In most areas the shift to Arabic included, in addition to the spoken register, even some religious texts and rituals. Macuch observes, however, that the main Aramaic cultural language, classical Syriac, still continued in some centers to be cultivated for centuries, and even now there are occasionally some enthusiastic efforts to revive it. However, especially in the remote and inaccessible areas of Kurdistan in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, this process of Arabic superseding Aramaic was generally arrested till the modern times. The vestigial Aramaic dialects (from around 1100 CE and until our time) are known by scholars as Neo-Aramaic or Modern Syriac.

Ex Cursus: What is in a Name?

Neo-Aramaic is spoken by about 800,000 Christians (known as Nestorians, Jacobites, and Chaldeans), 25,000 Jews, and a very small number of Mandeans (Europe) as a literary-religious medium (very much like Latin in the West) among the Jews until the present times. Even Modern Hebrew, especially its literary and scholarly registers, includes many borrowings from Aramaic, similar to the use in English of Latin expressions, such as bone fide, pro bono, in loco parentis. However, it seems, that the use of Aramaic, once the hallmark of literary and scholarly embellishment of Hebrew (as spoken and written by the learned), has been gradually decreasing in the more recent literary works in Israel; see Bar-Asher 41-46, 63-64.

6 Macuch 1990:214. For some exceptions of contemporary committed Syriac writers, philologists, historians and other individuals and organizations, see Brock 1989:368, and passim; he surveys in some detail the considerable amount of recent writings in Classical Syriac for literary, historical and cultural purposes; Naby, paper, speaks of the brief literary-cultural renaissance that occurred at the end of the 19th and the beginnings of the 20th centuries; Murre-van den Berg 1998 on “Syrian Awakening” (pp. 499ff.); Podolsky (in progress):3; Van Rompay, passim; Heinrichs, TA 668: "Classical Syriac in its Western variety, [is] used not only as a church language, but also as a medium for serious writing for the community; it is not entirely a dead language.”

7 These numbers are rough estimates. However, Sarguis 1992, p. 13, who obtained his estimates 'from discussions with State Department officials and Assyrians, estimates that in Iraq alone there were before the Gulf War 600,000 Chaldeans, and over 750,000 Assyrians. Of course many of them had already ceased speaking Neo-Aramaic and shifted to Arabic long ago. On bilingualism and multilingualism among the Assyrians as an intermediate stage before the language demise, see Odisho, 1993, passim.

It should be noted that it is very difficult to obtain reliable numbers about the minorities in the Middle East. Therefore scholars use some rough estimates; Kapeliuk 1999:11 estimates the number of Neo-Aramaic speakers as "several hundreds of thousands." Due to political subjective and objective reasons, the governments avoid providing exact numbers, and even members of the minority may prefer not to reveal their ethnic/religious identity while in the Middle East, or exaggerate the numbers of their community when living abroad in the West. Hence, having no better sources, I resort to quote numbers and similar sensitive issues from whatever sources I could obtain,
(a Gnostic sect), and some Muslims (see below), in diverse regions of Kurdistan, politically divided among the states of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria and ex-Soviet Union. Due to its long history and vast expansion, Aramaic, at various times and regions, has several other names, most important ones being Syriac (for Christians), Targum (for Jews), and Mandäic, including some misnomers, for instance, the Nestorian Christians who are Neo Aramaic speakers, mostly for nationalistic reasons, believing they are descendants of the ancient Assyrians, call their dialects "Assyrian," which is a sister Semitic language but is not Aramaic, whereas the Catholic Neo-Aramaic speakers call their language by the Biblical term 'Chaldean', for they reject the pagan Assyrian ancestry. The Jewish Neo-Aramaic speakers, after their emigration from Kurdistan to Israel, have been called Kurdim = 'Kurdish Jews', and their language is popularly called Kurdit = 'Kurdish', which, when properly used, it should designate an Iranian non-Semitic language, that is the language of the Muslim Kurds, and not the Neo-Aramaic dialects spoken by Kurdistani Jews and Christians.

In recent times, however, even these last fortresses of Aramaic have become an endangered species. Some dialects have disappeared or have only very few speakers left, while others may disappear altogether very soon. There are several reasons for this drastic change, including political, religious, sociological, and economical. Some of these reasons are common to Jews and Christians alike, while others are unique to each community. Common to both is the strong impact of motorized transportation and general population movement from rural areas to little towns and eventually to large urban centers. This in turn has enabled access to modern education and opened many opportunities and great mobility. Distinguished graduates of higher education with knowledge of several languages became employees of foreign oil companies and those with a good knowledge of Arabic became government officials. But even the uneducated were attracted to the larger centers. Baghdad in the 1940s had a large quarter of Neo-Aramaic immigrants from the mountains of Kurdistan. Many including general newspapers (such as the Los Angeles Times) and ethnic papers that serve the diaspora.

8 That was their rough estimate number before their emigration to Israel (see below). Now they number over 100,000, but most don't speak Neo-Aramaic anymore (see n. 11, below).


11 This misnomer is used by Israeli Kurdish Jews as well. However in Kurdistan, they either didn't use any particular name or used some general names such as lishana didan 'our language' or hodhayutha /hulaula 'Jewish', targum 'Targumic Aramaic' (only by a few Rabbis); for these and other names see Hopkins 1999: 317.

12 For details see Sabar 1995:34, §1.4; Podolsky (in progress), passim.

13 For details see Odisho, 1993.
young women worked as maids and young men did all kinds of menial jobs. All these people, the educated and the uneducated gradually shifted from NA to the urban language, Arabic in Iraq and Syria, Persian in Iran, Turkish in Turkey, etc. Moreover, some towns (such as Irbil, Karkuk) which were known to have Jewish and Christian NA speakers as late as the end of last century, a generation later (in the 1930s) almost the entire community already spoke Arabic. With the rise of Arab nationalism in Iraq, and the new state of Iraq, Arabic became a prestigious language and all minority languages such as NA and Kurdish lost much prestige and were neglected. A similar situation occurred in Turkey where Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic are discouraged, to say the least. An article in Los Angeles Times (8/21/98) mentions that Turkey bans even the monks of the revered Mar Gabriel monastery (in Tur Abdin region), founded in 397 CE, to teach the Aramaic language to the last 30 pupils still left in the community. The transition from rural to urban, which we may call stage 1, was followed by emigration from Middle Eastern countries to Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, and South America - for the Christians, and Israel - for the Jews. After each war, beginning from the First World War, there were large waves of emigration, especially of minorities who were displaced and felt very insecure culturally, politically and economically about their future in the Middle East. Many Christian Neo-Aramaic speakers emigrated to the USA in the 1920's and settled in Chicago, Detroit, San Francisco, etc. The most recent waves were after the Iranian revolution and the Gulf War. About 300,000 Assyrians have emigrated to the United States since the late 1800; the majority live in the Chicago area.

14 For details see Sabar 1988:96.
15 Of course even some prominent majority languages/dialects in certain locality, may become a minority (for typology/definitions, see Owens 2000:1-6) and perhaps even endangered in another, e.g., Arabic dialects in the Hatay province of Turkey (adjacent to Syria) (Arnold 2000), Palestinian Arabic in Israel (Talmon 2000).
16 On the important role of the monastery of Mar Gabriel for the nurturing of Classical Syriac, see Brock 1989:366; on this and other ancient important neighboring monasteries, see Streck TA 667.
17 Naby, paper, lists the following reasons: “Persecution, virulent state nationalism, genocide and flight have resulted in a diaspora that has drained the ancient homeland of its inhabitants to the near extinction...”; cf. Mutzafi 2000: 294: “Oppression, wars and political upheavals prompted almost all rural Assyrians of Northern Iraq to leave their villages...emigrating in large numbers to North America, Europe and Australia.” Rizkalla, a native of the village of Ma'lula gives this reason: “Fifty years ago, all the students in Ma'lula spoke Aramaic, and some of them could speak Arabic with Difficulty. Now all speak Arabic, and some struggle with the Aramaic... [Talking about his own children who work in Damascus:] There they cannot see goats, or trees or peasants working in the field. So all the words of these things are forgotten...[and] the language gets poorer and poorer” (Crystal 2000: 25).
Around 75,000 Chaldeans live mostly in Detroit. In 1975, during a fieldwork visit to Iran, I found some Jews and Christians who still spoke Neo-Aramaic, but almost all of them already had some relatives abroad and planned to join them soon. Similarly, after the Gulf War, I visited Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan, and found that entire Neo-Aramaic speaking villages (as well as Kurdish ones) have been destroyed and their residents uprooted to larger towns where they were awaiting the first chance to emigrate abroad. According to Eamama (July 1998), an Assyrian newspaper published in Canada, local Iraqi Bishops and the Vatican are still trying to stem the flight of Iraqi Christians. The clergymen blame the trade sanctions imposed on Iraq by the UN for the flight of more than 250,000 Iraqi Christians (almost one third). Since the second Gulf War (2003) thousands of Iraqi Christians have been emigrating to Australia, Europe, USA, etc.

Almost all of the Christian Neo-Aramaic speakers of Turkey have immigrated to Europe, mostly Sweden. According to the Los Angeles Times article mentioned above, fewer than 3,000 Neo-Aramaic speakers are left in Turkey out of a population that once numbered 50,000. Needless to say, all these immigrants, like any immigrant society, sooner or later merge into the mainstream, or the melting pot, shifting from their native language to the new country's language. Sweden seems to be an exception in this regard. It is the only country I know of whose government publishes textbooks in Neo-Aramaic (and other immigrant-minority languages) for school children, an enterprise that hopefully will slow down the assimilation process. Also in Syria, the government, mostly for touristic reasons (and therefore, economic), does not impede the preservation of the only survivors of western Neo-Aramaic dialects known as Ma'lula. These dialects, spoken by Christians and Muslims in three villages on a lofty mountain near Damascus, are advertised as the language of Christ. And almost every year near Christmas time there is some article about Ma'lula in several Western newspapers and magazines, such as the Los Angeles Times, Time Magazine, and Newsweek. Yet, even there the younger generation seems reluctant to stay, and often emigrates elsewhere. In a recent broadcast on

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19 Of course, almost like any rule, there are some exceptions, like the growth of Yiddish among the Orthodox and Ultra Orthodox Jews in some enclaves of New York, and the Old Order Amish and Mennonites, who generally maintain a stable bilingualism, i.e., Pennsylvania German ("Dutch") and English. See also above end of nn. 4, 6.

20 For details and bibliography on various European emigration centers (Germany, Holland, Sweden, Austria), and on the publishing in Sweden of Syriac textbooks, see Brock 1989:366 f.; Heinrichs, TA 669, who also gives some numbers: "The total figure of [the Tûrôyo Neo-Aramaic] speakers is not precisely known, but is likely to be in excess of 50,000," most of them living in Germany, the Netherlands, the USA and Sweden (for which an estimated number of 18,000 is given).

21 Situation very similar to Eastern Neo-Aramaic; cf. Arnold 2000:370; and Arnold forthcoming: "The population of Ma'lula is Christian with a small minority of Moslems...(But the other two villages) are purely Moslem villages. Many speakers of Western Neo-Aramaic live outside the three villages, mainly in Damascus but also in
National Public Radio some local nuns were asked by the journalist to sing in Aramaic but the songs they sang were actually in Arabic.

In the host countries there are no more than some communal, or semi-academic efforts (such as by the Assyrian Academic Society) to maintain some limited use of the language and to teach it to the next generations. To judge from the Assyrian (=Neo-Aramaic) clubs in Southern California (e.g., Los Angeles, where I live), occasionally a speech is given in the major Neo-Aramaic dialect of Urmi (but most of the younger people don't understand and get bored), and even Neo-Aramaic folkloric plays are often translated into English so that the audience will not miss the jokes. A typical Assyrian-immigrant newspaper such as Eamama which is published in Canada includes articles in 4 languages: Assyrian-Aramaic, Persian, Arabic and English. The commitment to preserve Neo-Aramaic is not, generally speaking, as strong among the Assyrian Neo-Aramaic speakers as is, for example, commitment to Armenian among the Armenians. Being a stateless people, the Christian Neo-Aramaic speakers derive their ethnic pride mostly from their 'Assyrian past' or from their ancient variety of Christian denominations (Nestorian/Jacobite/Chaldean). It is interesting to note that most of the studies of Neo-Aramaic dialects in recent years are based on a very few, 3-4 surviving informants, or even just one last "Mohican," who is still able to speak the dialect. By the way, another typical indicator of language loss is replacing traditional names with new foreign names. Many Neo-Aramaic Christians who moved from rural areas to cities adopted either Arabic names (e.g. Tariq Aziz the foreign minister of Iraq whose Neo-Aramaic name was Mikhael Yohanna), or European names, such as Robert, Edward, George, Regina, Daisy, Helen, etc.

Beirut and Yarbud....(It) is not cultivated or sponsored by the Syrian government...Today the language is spoken by a maximum of 10,000 people. All of them speak Arabic as a second mother tongue (emphasis mine-Y.S.); " cf. however, Crystal 2000 24: "((C)urrently spoken by c. 6,000 in three villages near Damascus) is gradually being displaced by Arabic.

22 Cf. Brock 1989:369, for a similar situation in Europe, e.g. Qølø Suryøø in Holland publishes articles in Syriac, Turkish, Arabic and German; whereas a magazine of the Syrian church in Damascus uses Arabic. (!) exclusively. For a study on the strains suffered by Assyrian immigrants in the USA, see Ishaya 1988.

23 On maintenance of Armenian in the USA see Davidian 1986; Ordjanian 1991 (I thank my colleague Peter Cowe for providing me with this source). However, in contrast to Armenians who have a state, Armenia, that supports and encourages Armenians in diaspora to keep cultivating their traditional and state language, the Aramaic-speaking Christians do not have a state of their own to support and encourage cultivation of Aramaic in diaspora. There are only voluntary organizations, such as the Assyrian American Association of Southern California, who try with their meager means to cultivate their language and culture.

24 See n. 5 above.

As for the emigration of Neo-Aramaic speaking Jews to Israel, it was almost purely for religious-nationalistic reasons. Indeed, also some of the Neo-Aramaic speaking Christians were somewhat motivated by religion to emigrate from Muslim countries such as Iraq and Iran to Western-'Christian' countries (i.e. at least countries with a Christian majority) such as the USA, Europe, Canada, Australia, and South America. The Jews of Kurdistan started emigrating to Palestine/Israel already at the end of the 19th Century, and more so in the 1920s, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the upheavals of the First World War. However, after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, practically all the Jews of Kurdistan emigrated to Israel, mostly in the early 1950s. In Sabar 1975, it was shown how Hebrew, with its powerful prestige as the national language of Israel, had been superseding the Neo-Aramaic of the immigrants. At that time there were still many speakers of Neo-Aramaic or at least bilinguals of Hebrew and Neo-Aramaic, especially in the rural areas and the areas where Kurdistani Jews were concentrated. However by 1999, almost all of the old timers had died or were dying. Their children may still have some passive knowledge, that is to say, they may understand simple conversation in Neo-Aramaic of their parents but will respond in Hebrew or very broken Neo-Aramaic, and only know names of certain ethnic foods, some typical cultural items, etc. The grandchildren have almost lost the Neo-Aramaic of their ancestors altogether. No child is born to parents who speak Neo-Aramaic at home as their first language (and that usually means 'clinical' death of the language). One occasionally reads an article like the one from Associated Press (Los Angeles Times, May 30, 1998, and many other papers all over the world) entitled: "Saving an Ancient Language: A musician is hoping his songs will help preserve Aramaic." It is about an Israeli band, named Nash Didan = 'Our People' that sings in Neo-Aramaic and has now two compact discs of these songs. According to the band's leader, Arik Mordechai, his aging parents asked him to keep the language going and he thought: 'The music is where the culture starts. People can learn a little bit of a language that way'. This effort and other similar ones actually show the despair of the few individuals who wish to keep the language going. However, most of the speakers do not care about the loss of their Neo-Aramaic language and have shifted to Hebrew without much feeling of linguistic deprivation. For most of them Hebrew has been for millennia a holy language of the Bible, prayer book and Jewish rituals. Thus, discarding the mother tongue to return to the language of the forefathers has not been a major issue. Moreover, the Kurdistani Jews have had a tradition that they are

26 The information about the emigration of Neo-Aramaic speakers to South America was provided to me by Francis Sarguis, former English editor of the Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies.

27 The news about these two CD Neo-Aramaic records reached even the Internet and were featured in the "World's Global Hit" for Thursday, September 3, 1998, and they are selling very well in Israel and elsewhere.
descendants of the ancient Hebrews who were exiled from Ancient Israel to Assyria in 721 B.C. (by Sargon II). Therefore, they consider their return in modern times to Israel and the shift to Hebrew as a full-circle return to the ancient sources.

To conclude: Aramaic which began as a language of some little local kingdoms in Ancient Syria, and expanded to become the lingua franca of the Assyrian and Persian Empires, to be gradually superseded by Arabic in the 7th Cent. CE, and continuing to survive in remote and inaccessible areas of the Middle East, is reaching the end of its long life, at least as a spoken language. The question in the title of my article, alluding to the famous writing on the wall from the Book of Daniel,

List of References


Crystal, D., 1997, English as a global language, Cambridge U.P.


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28 Based on Kings II 17:6: In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria. He deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled them in Halah, at the [River] Habor ....

29 In recent 10-15 years there is some nostalgia about the past (at least by some individuals), which includes publication of two popular dictionaries of Jewish Neo-Aramaic, translations of some Biblical and ritual books (Psalms, Song of Songs, Passover Haggada, etc.). However, these books are usually acquired by very few native speakers.

30 The book of Daniel includes the famous writing which appeared on the wall of the hall at the banquet of the Chaldean Babylonian King Belshazzar: mene mene, tekel upharsin, which Daniel interpreted as 'mene = God has numbered your days and brought it to an end; tekel = you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting; pharsin = your kingdom has been divided.'

31 This can be slowed down and even reversed only if the Aramaic speaking Christians of Iraq have a state of their own in their ancient territory, the area of Nineveh and surrounding, where Aramaic would become a state language.


Heinrichs, W., TA = “Tur-Abdin: Languages,” Encyclopaedia of Islam, n.e., 668-70.


Schwarzwald (Rodrique), Ora, 1999, "Trends of Foreign Influence on Modern


Assyrian Christians in English Fiction, 1849-1967

J.F. Coakley, Ph.D.

This article identifies and briefly describes five British and American novels whose narratives take place among Assyrian Christians. They are disparate: besides being spread over a long span of time, the first three are British and more or less directly concerned with the Church of the East, while the last two are American and set within the Presbyterian mission to the Assyrians in Iran. Even so, there is a good reason for bringing these five books together here; namely, that they are very little known to scholars in our field and yet they all have a place in the history of western consciousness of the Assyrians. I hope that some future studies may make use of them, and that this article will be at least a bibliographical starting-point. All this is, of course, beside my wish to honour Daniel Benyamin and Francis Sarguis, both scholars who have generously helped me in the past and for whose friendship I am grateful.

I

Annie Webb, Julamerk: a tale of the Nestorians

The story. Zoraide, a Jewish girl, is travelling with her parents across Hakkari to Urmia. Her party are saved from Kurdish robbers by the gallant Isaac, brother of Mar Abraham Shimun; but the Kurds retaliate and capture her, and she has to be saved again from a forced marriage. She is ill and accepts nursing in Mar
Shimun’s household, where her religious doubts are overcome by the wise Patriarch and his sister, and she becomes a Christian on her deathbed.

_The author._ Annie Webb (Mrs. J. B. Webb, later Webb-Peploe) was the author of twenty or more Evangelical novels, the best known of which was _Naomi: or, the last days of Jerusalem_ (1841 and very often reprinted).¹

_Publishing history._ There are at least ten different editions of _Julamerk_ datable to 1849-1882, plus a German translation (1863). The first edition was in 3 volumes, unillustrated. The ornamental title-page and seven illustrations appear in stereotyped one-volume editions (of 489 pages) from 1851. Whether because the publishers thought ‘Nestorian’ would not be recognized, or because the conversion of Jews was a theme with more sales appeal, some editions changed the title: we have _The Jewess of Julamerk_ (1850); _Julamerk: a tale of the Holy Land_ (undated); and _Julamerk, or the converted Jewess_ (1882). The edition of 1882 has different, coloured, illustrations.

_Other notes._ 1. Mrs. Webb made the best of the little published information she could have seen in 1849 on the Assyrian Christians or their homeland. Her chief source was evidently Asahel Grant’s _The Nestorians, or the Lost Tribes_ (1841). Although she had a fair grip on the geography of Hakkari, the name Kochanes for Mar Shimun’s village was not known to her. An appendix was added to the novel in 1850 or 1851 with two extracts from Layard’s _Nineveh and its remains_ (published in 1849) recording ‘the recent [but it was in 1843] massacre of the Nestorians’.

2. The idea that the Nestorians were the Protestants of Asia, given currency by the American missionaries of the ABCFM,² is here followed to extreme lengths. The religious conversations between Zoraida and the Patriarch’s sister Helena might be set in an Evangelical household in Britain. The illustration reproduced above shows the Patriarch warning another Assyrian character, Paul, that unless his religious convictions become more serious, he will not be an acceptable husband for Helena! There is also a sinister Catholic missionary, Father Geronimo, all of whose cynical approaches to the Assyrians are repulsed.

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¹ I am disappointed not to be able to supply more information about Mrs. Webb. There seem to be no studies or even encyclopedia articles about her. Her Jewish heroines are discussed by Nadia Valman, _The Jewess in 19th century British literary culture_ (Cambridge University Press 2007), Zoraida briefly on pp. 83-4.

² Justin Perkins, _A residence of eight years in Persia among Nestorian Christians_ (1843).
The story. The island of Kapini, off the coast of Sumatra, has been evangelized for the Church of the East by the missionary bishop Mar Xabro. After seven years, in 1258, he sets out to make his report to the Catholikos. In the course of his trip he meets the leader of the Assassins in his fortress of Alamut, and then Hulagu Khan who is preparing to advance on Baghdad. In chapters alternating with Mar Xabro’s story, we have the journal of Denha, the native leader of the Christian people of Kapini, recounting how they fight off tigers who swim across the strait and attack their village.

The author. The Rev. John Mason Neale (1818-66) was one of the great figures of the Anglo-Catholic movement. His writings include scholarly works, hymns, and fiction, much in each category being associated with eastern churches.

Publishing history. The story was published by John Henry and James Parker as a stand-alone volume of 91 pages in 1860, then re-issued as one of five stories, apparently all by Neale, in their Tales illustrating church history, vol. 6: Asia and Africa (1863). A new edition was published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in 1916, chiefly marketed to churches for giving to children as Sunday-school prizes. The illustrations above show the frontispiece of the original edition and the new illustrated cover of 1916.

Other notes. 1. The story ends with a curious claim: ‘Reader – I do not call this a story. But as a series of sketches of a Church of which, perhaps, you have scarcely heard, this little book may have its interest. I believe them to be true.’ Neale drew on wide reading, no doubt, but much comes from his imagination.
William Marsden, *The history of Sumatra* (3rd ed. 1811) gives the name Kapini and discusses tigers, but does not mention them swimming to outlying islands. Nor does he, or any other source that I can discover, record that the island was ever reached by missionaries from the Church of the East.

2. Neale is known to scholars in our field by his somewhat back-handed introduction to G. P. Badger’s *The Nestorians and their rituals* (1852). His remarks in *The sea-tigers* are similar, declaring that the Church of the East was a wonderful agent of salvation, and yet doomed by its heresy.³


### III

**E. L. Cutts, *Amina: a tale of the Nestorians***

*The story*. The narrator, an Englishman on a leisurely return journey from India, meets Assyrian Christians in the hill-country of Persia. A village priest’s daughter Amina is abducted by a Kurdish chief Khassim Agha. When a Persian judge will not give them justice, the villagers, led by the Englishman, recapture her. They take her over the Turkish border into the mountains, where the Englishman stays on as a guest of the tribal Assyrians. While hunting he is ambushed by Khassim Agha, but the Kurd is killed by the Assyrian Malek Isha. A Turkish official who comes to investigate the killing is politely paid off and sent away. Isha marries Amina.

The author. Edward L. Cutts, a London clergyman and writer on various ecclesiastical subjects, volunteered for a fact-finding mission among the Assyrian Christians of Persia and Turkey in 1876. This was partly funded by the SPCK. He kept a journal and took photographs, the main product of which was his book Christians under the crescent in Asia (SPCK 1877).

Publishing history. There is no date on the title-page. Internal evidence (see the note below) would suggest that the story was written in the period 1877-1880; but it first appears in the catalogue of the publishers, again the SPCK, only in 1890. My copy was a Sunday-school prize in 1891.

Other notes. 1. The story dwells on the helplessness of the Assyrians without the aid of westerners. But there is an ambivalent reference to the American mission in Urmia: one of the Assyrians speaks English thanks to this mission, but it has lately wanted the Assyrians to ‘adopt the doctrines and practices of the Americans’. All this looks like part of the appeal for an English mission, in which Cutts was engaged in the years following his trip, and which eventuated in the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission to the Assyrian Christians in 1886.

2. The dashing figure on the front cover (replicating the frontispiece) is oddly Khassim Agha, the villain of the story. The word ‘Nestorians’ in the subtitle is also one that Cutts would not have used. One might infer that the publishers acted on a manuscript they had had on file for some time, without perhaps reading it again or consulting the author!

Rachel Schauffler, The goodly fellowship

4 Alas, the journal and one hundred photographs do not survive.

5 For Cutts’s work in its context see The Church of the East (n. 3 above), 55-97.
The story. Jean Stuart, a wealthy young New England woman travelling to escape an unhappy past, finds herself in ‘Muramna’ (Urmia) among the American Presbyterian missionaries and their families. (They are the ‘goodly fellowship’ of the title.) Stranded there for the winter, she is gradually forced to modify her scepticism about missionaries and Christianity in general, especially following the murder of the most respected of the missionaries Dan Lawrence by a local criminal, Hadji Husain. A standoff love affair between Jean and another of the missionaries, Thorley Prescott, runs through the story, and at the end, after Prescott escapes being shot by Husain (who is then killed by a friendly Kurd), there is the anticipation of a marriage.

The author. Rachel Capen Schauffler belonged to a famous missionary family, being the granddaughter of William Gottlieb Schauffler (1798-1883), a pioneer missionary in Constantinople and Bible translator. This was her first and only published book.

Publishing history. The novel was ‘one of the Macmillan fiction successes of the spring’ of 1912 (in the publisher’s words). According to a notice in the New York Times for 29 June 1913 it had a second printing. The book has now been digitized and can be read at: http://www.archive.org/details/goodlyfellowship00schaiala.

Other notes. 1. The novel is about the missionaries rather than their clients and Assyrian Christians do not figure very prominently. They appear in Urmia mainly as refugees from famine conditions across the border in Turkey. (Prescott organizes a factory to produce clay water-pipes, giving employment to the men.)

2. Rachel Schauffler’s sister was Mary Schauffler Labaree (later Mary Schauffler Platt), wife of the Urmia missionary Benjamin Woods Labaree who was murdered in 1904. Schauffler wrote the book in memory of him and made him the model for Dan Lawrence. She began the book in 1905 as a biography but then settled on a fictional treatment. The other missionaries, she insisted, were ‘typical’ and not intended to be specific real people. The book underwent changes after criticism by her sister and then by a publisher’s reader. In the end, the family and other missionaries thought the local colour was very successful.

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7 For some of the facts here I am grateful to Prof. Benjamin W. Labaree. In 2008 I spent a pleasant day with him reading some correspondence and other papers of his grandmother Mary Schauffler Labaree and Rachel Schauffler in his keeping.

8 On this incident, which was shocking and consequential even in the bandit country where the mission operated, see A. Yeselson, United States-Persian diplomatic relations 1883-1921 (1956), 68-84.
3. In the wake of *The goodly fellowship* Rachel Schauffler was entrusted with a book about the recent history of the mission and the Assyrians, a first draft of which had been written by the head of the mission William A. Shedd. But years passed, the war overtook the project and Shedd died; and after writing three chapters, she handed the manuscript over to Shedd’s widow Mary Lewis Shedd. She in turn wrote a biography of her husband, *The measure of a man: William A. Shedd of Persia* (1922), in which she acknowledges the help of Rachel Schauffler; but probably little of Rachel’s work survives in it.

Margaret Shedd, *Hosannah Tree*

*The story.* In ‘Aliabad’ (Urmia), the Persian governor is a puppet of the sinister Mullah Hussein Agha, himself probably in the pay of Germany; the Turks and Russians are the great powers not far away; the Kurds, especially the tribe headed by Simkoo, are a menacing presence; the American missionaries enjoy a precarious acceptance; and their clients the Assyrian Christians are powerless. The war beginning in 1914 destabilizes this already unsafe state of affairs, with grim consequences for the Assyrians. Will Lucas, head of the mission, has to oversee relief work, while suffering the loss of his wife to typhoid and sending his beloved children to America. Will and his second wife, the doctor Sarah Eames, accompany the Assyrians in their flight from the city to the British lines at Hamadan, but Will dies of cholera on the way.

*The author.* Margaret Cochran Shedd (1900-86) was one of two daughters of the American missionary William A. Shedd and his first wife Adela Myers. She lived in Urmia until age 12 when she and her sister were sent to America. After her marriage she lived partly in California and partly in Mexico where she founded the Centro Mexicano de Escritores, for Mexican and American writers. *Hosannah tree* was her fourth novel; and she was the author of many short stories.
**Publishing history.** The novel was published by Doubleday in March 1967.

**Other notes.** 1. The character of Will Lucas is the author’s father William A. Shedd, and the novel traces his life from before the war until his death near the end of it. His missionary career and the greater events around him (but not his family, marriages and children) follow quite closely the published biography by his wife Mary mentioned above. This includes the presence of real characters such as Simko and the Assyrian militia commander Agha Petros. But some events are extra-historical or at least enhanced novelistically. The identities and personal stories of the other missionaries are, just as in The goodly fellowship, generalized.

2. The novel takes its title from the ‘hosannah tree’ (the name is not explained) in front of the porch of the Lucas house, a token of the innocent life of the missionary children in Urmia in earlier and happier days.

3. Margaret Shedd told an interviewer that she had had little memory of her own childhood in Iran until it returned as she started to write. She tried to find her father’s manuscript (mentioned above as in the possession of Rachel Schauffler), but it had evidently disappeared. She did, however, read a diary of her stepmother Louise Wilbur Shedd (William’s second wife, d. 1915). She also corresponded with Mary Schauffler Platt, and with her stepmother Mary Lewis Shedd. Mrs. Shedd died in 1962 and the book is dedicated to her memory.

4. Among the correspondence that followed the publication of Hosannah tree are letters to the author from some former Urmia missionaries and children with recollections of the time; and a letter from Lady Surma d-Mar Shimun. Surma recalls that she stayed with the Shedd family in Urmia during the war, but regrets that an operation on her eyes now prevented her from reading the book.

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9 For example, there are details of a massacre of Christians at Gulpashan (p. 183) and a near-massacre planned by Simko at Ardishai (pp. 230ff.) which I do not find anyhow in sources that I have seen. An example at a different level is her depiction of Mar Polos Shimun, who speaks with a stutter (p. 343). Is this historical?

10 For this and the next note I draw on the Margaret Shedd papers in the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University. Boxes 7, 8, 9-10, and 16 of this collection contain papers related to Hosannah tree. Of most interest is box 16 containing correspondence, research notes (only a few) and reviews.
On Typography in the Arabic and Syriac Languages and its Pioneers in the 16th Century

Michael Abdalla, Ph.D.

The printing technique was one of the key innovations in the field of preservation of spoken word in unlimited number of copies. It boosted readership, dynamized the process of rendition of works from one language into another, revolutionized the intellectual life and accelerated the transfer of ideas, facilitating intercultural contacts and inter-civilizational dialogue.

The origins of printing in modern times have been credited to the Chinese. There is no doubt that the Arabs had learned the paper-making skills from the Chinese and for many centuries had a monopoly on export sales of this product to Europe. But the view promoted by some contemporary Arab authors that the first paper mill in Europe was established in 1147 by the French who allegedly learned the arcane knowledge of paper making from Damascene “Muslims” during the Second Crusade is at least controversial. It has been proven that the Arabs used duplicators (duplicating machines) as reflected by fragments of printed texts dated to the 9th century AD deposited in many libraries.

It is commonly believed that the first to introduce the movable type in Europe was a German goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg (1399-1468). The first printing house was opened in 1458 in Strasburg, and in the second half of the 15th century printing houses were operating already in as many as over 240 cities across Europe.

**It started in Europe**

Contacts between Europe and the Middle East are dated at the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennium BC. In some periods, some parts of both these areas formed a single state both in the ancient and modern times. For the contributions of ancient Middle Eastern civilizations (mainly the alphabet), Europe repaid with deciphering cuneiform writing texts and Egyptian hieroglyphs and with the discovery of the monuments of the forgotten cultures of...
On typography in the Arabic and Syriac languages and its pioneers in the 16th century

Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt. A huge influence that has also been exerted in recent centuries and is still exerted globally with European technical developments have continued to exert a huge influence in recent centuries and even today globally especially in the field of printing.

Interestingly, the first attempts to print texts in Semitic languages were made in Europe only a few years after the introduction of Gutenberg’s invention and Hebrew³ was the first language of the group to be an object of such attempts.

Two other Semitic languages to raise interest were Arabic and Syriac. The first Arabic movable types made of wooden blocks were impressed together with phonetic transcription of the letters in the book Peregrinatio In Terram Sanctam [A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land] by a German author Bernhard von Breydenbach (1440-1497), published in Mainz in 1498.⁴

It can be presumed from available sources that as many as three Oriental books were published in Europe throughout the 15th century, two Hebrew ones and one book with Arabic elements (picture 2).

Some Muslim authors make lengthy descriptions of the efforts made by the hierarchs of the Church in Spain to convert the Moors to Christianity, especially following the recapture of Granada from the Muslims (1492), maintaining that this was the only purpose of the books published in Arabic at that time. The Bishop of Granada, Fernando de Talavera is believed to have said: “Christianization of the Moors cannot be effective if the people of the Church in Granada do not learn the Arabic language.” This declaration was supposed to mobilize the clergy and printers to learn this language and to publish books about Christianity helpful in their “dialogue” with the Muslims. A handbook for the learning of the Arabic language written by a Spanish monk, Pedro de Alcal, issued in two parts in Granada in 1505 tends to be mentioned in this context. In the introduction, the author complains that he finished writing the handbook in 1501 but due to lack of a printing house, the text was embossed with wooden matrices by Juan de Varela⁵ only in 1505.

³ The topic has been discussed by K. Pilarczyk, a Hebrew book printed in Central-East Europe in the 16th –18th century, “Studia Judaica“ 10, 1 (19), 2007, pp. 1-23, pointing out to the fact that Hebrew typography was growing in Italy in the first half of the 16th century owing to the Soncino family (pp. 7-9) who had accepted the surname after the Italian town of Soncino. Currently there is a Jewish publishing house under the firm of Soncino operating in Brooklyn (NY). Its logo is a three-storey tower.
⁴ S. Gharib, Awa’il al-matbu‘at al-‘arabiyya tarikh li-bidayat as-sahafa [The Early Arabic Publications as a Beginning of the Press History], “Al-‘Arabi”, (511), April, 2001, pp. 21-23, writes that wooden types for this handbook were carved by a Dominican monk, Martin Roth in 1484 and therefore he should be considered to be the initiator of movable Arabic type. The book sized 29, 5 cm x 40,6 cm contains unique drawings of cities and ports visited by the author.
⁵ The title of this handbook was Arte para ligeramente saber la lengua arauiga [The Art of quick learning of the Arabic language] and its next editions appeared in 1505 (Granada) and 1883 (Göttingen). In 1928, the Spanish-American Society in New York published volume 2. As-Samarra‘i, Naduat [Symposium...] op. cit., p. 53, 88; Ponti O., in his book La tipografia araba in Italia dal XVI al XIX secolo, G. Bardi, Roma 1964
Disregarding the opinion of some of the contemporary Arab authors who interpret the Europeans’ willingness to learn Arabic as “a hidden anti-Muslim plan”, one needs to admit that the choice of the target groups for the specific products of printing houses was not always purely accidental. Often the texts were addressed to the Middle Eastern Christians in an attempt to attract them to the Latin Church. The handbook كتاب صلاة السوادي – The Book of the Liturgy of the Hours according to the rite of the Melkite Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria, printed in whole in the Arabic language is given as an example. It had 211 pages and was published on September 12, 1514. The print was done in the printing house established on the initiative of the Pope Julius II in the town of Fano. The running of the printing house was entrusted to Gregorio de Gregorii of Venice, and casting of the types is believed to have been the work of typographer, Francisco Griffio. Two years later, owing to the efforts of Pietro Paolo Porra, The Book of Psalms was published in Genoa in four languages: Hebrew, Greek, Arabic and “Chaldean” together with the Latin version. The print was done in a printing house run by Agostino Giustiniani, belonging to the King of France, François I.

In the following twenty years types for twelve Oriental languages were cast, including the Samaritan, Coptic, Ethiopian, Georgian, and Armenian, which were quickly distributed to many contemporary printing houses in Europe. They were used for instance, for printing in 1538 in Paris of a handbook entitled Lingvarum duodecim characteri containing tips for learning of these languages, authored probably by Guillaume Postel, a former French diplomat in Constantinople.

In the same year, Joseph Justus Scaliger (a Frenchman of Italian origin), who had learned Arabic from G. Postel, published in Basel A Dictionary of the Arabic Language, A year later The Book of the Liturgy of the Hours (picture 3) was reissued complete with an introduction to the “Chaldee” language. And in 1543 one more book: Gramatica Arabica was published in Paris. These books were printed with the types made by Rutger Spey, used also later to print The Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians in 1583 in Heidelberg. Other titles included: Alphabetum Arabicum by Jacob Christmann (Neustadt, 1582), Compendium Grammatices Arabicae by R. Spey (Frankfurt, 1583) and Introduction to the Learning of the Arabic Language by Bartholomaeus Radtmann (Frankfurt, 1592). From the contemporary accounts, it is known that in the 16th century the interest in the Arabic language was considerable in southern Europe, especially among high society. Some well-to-do citizens of Andalusia employed native Arabic speakers or Moors and in addition to pay, they offered them board and accommodation in return for Arabic lessons. Memoirs of Arab captives have


been preserved, who described their living conditions after their release from
captivity and discussions on religious topics they conducted as language teachers
with their hosts – students.7 The history of a Dutch priest, Nicolaus Klenardus
seems to be particularly fascinating. Having learned Hebrew and Greek, he
decided to learn also the Arabic language and set on a journey across Andalusia
in search of Arabic manuscripts. In 1538, he helped to set free a Muslim prisoner
of war and employed him as a language teacher. In his letters, he addressed him
as Kharufius menus (the son of my lamb!). The teacher turned out to be a known
Arab scholar, Muhammad bin Kharouf. When the Moroccan Sultan wanted to
buy him out in 1540, his student made a condition: “I will set him free if I am
allowed to accompany him to perfect my command of Arabic.” Together they
reached Sebta, and then Fes. However, the fatwa prohibiting Muslims to contact
Christian priests forced him to leave Morocco. He died in Granada in 1542. He is
thought to be the first or one of the first Dutch orientalists.8

A big event for the Assyrian community of Tur Abdin (south-east Turkey)
was the departure for Vienna of a priest named Mushe Qashisho Ishq in 1553.
By recommendation of two Austrian orientalists: Jean Albert Widmanstad,
member of the cabinet of the Emperor Ferdinand I, and the earlier mentioned
Guillaume Postel, the Assyrian guest supervised the making of the new Syriac
types, with typeface similar to writing script recorded in the manuscript of the
four Gospels he traveled with. The purpose of this undertaking was to print the
four Gospels in the Syriac language for the first time in Europe. The Printing
was finished in 1555. To a village priest, a trip to a big metropolis and mixing with
the people from the emperor’s court must have been a great experience. This is
reflected in his words contained in the preface to the collection9 (picture 1).

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7 P.S. Koningsveld, G.A. Wiegers, The Polemical Works of Muhammad al-Qaysî
(fl. 1309) and Their Circulation in Arabic and Aljamiado among the Mudejars in the
8 P.S. Koningsveld, Muslim Slaves and Captives in Western Europe during the Late
9 The text comes from a book issued in the Syriac, Arabic and English languages, by A.
Nouro (died 2009, Aleppo), Krukhio dil(i) [Gaulati, My Tour], Dar ar-Raid, Beirut 1967,
p. 75/336. Both versions of the spelling of the name of Rome present in the text: ﻛﺭﻭختار
and ﻛﺭﻭختار are pronounced in the same way.
Translation:

With the help of Our Lord, Jesus Christ and by the mercy of Ferdinand, the Roman Emperor.
The message and the teaching of the Holy Gospel [according to] the four Holy Evangelists: Mathew, Mark, Luke and John were printed with the Syriac letters and language complete with the analysis following the comparison with [the text of] two additional old Syriac copies, through the agency of Mushe Qashisho bar Qashisho Ishq of Mesopotamia, from the village of Sauro, near the town of Mardin, a disciple and messenger of Mar Ignatios, the Patriarch of Antioch\(^{10}\) the honorable fathers: Mar Fawlos III and Mar Yulius, also III, the Pope of Rome,\(^{11}\) with the help and

\(^{10}\) This refers to the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, Ignatius Abdalla I (1520-1557).

\(^{11}\) Paul III (the Pope of Rome: 1534-1549), Yulius III (the Pope of Rome: 1550-1555). The stress put on the idea of printing the Gospel also by Paul III may indicate that the author arrived to Vienna earlier or that he heard about this concern of the pope from his
commitment of the honorable Jean Albert Widmanstad, a man of God, having profound knowledge and intelligence, a learning loving lecturer in the Roman law, member of the imperial council of the king of kings, the Roman king and administrator of East Austria – may our Lord, Jesus Christ bestow his grace upon him for he adores foreigners, especially the Assyrians, and for his command of the Syriac and many other languages and for him turning to the Emperor to ask for permission for the publication of these books. May the Lord save him, his wife and daughters from the evil and have him in his kingdom. So let this be. Amen.

“Catholic” printing houses vs. controversial “uniatism”

The 16th century witnessed Vatican’s continued efforts to extend its jurisdiction over Oriental and Eastern Churches. In the case of the Maronites, the process started during the First Crusade and lasted until the middle of the 18th century. In addition, the Assyrians who in 1320 settled in Cyprus, and the Maronites who in 1290 arrived to the island after the Mamelukes’ conquest of Tripoli, became the object of invigilation by the “missionaries” and of gradual latinization.

Making use of their material, technical and organizational advantages and of privileges they enjoyed within the structures of the European states the “missionaries”, without any scruples, persuaded the “schismatics” to recognize the primacy of the Pope. As a result part of the faithful were snatched from each of the indigenous Churches, both of the Antioch (“Nestorian,” “Jacobite,” “Maronite”) tradition, Alexandria (Coptic) and the Constantinople (Melkite) tradition. The Uniate Churches were established both in the Middle East and in Indian Malabar. At the same time, the Catholic missionaries systematically stripped the Middle Eastern monasteries of native manuscripts. The publication of leaflets and books started to accelerate the process of the Romanization of the newly recruited members. Especially the Eastern Assyrians painfully experienced this; the ones who submitted to Rome were named “the Chaldees.”

On the other hand, the discovery of the rich tradition of the Middle Eastern Churches led the hosts. The author refers to the Roman popes using the “Mar” title, the same one used when referring to the hierarchs of the Assyrian Church he belongs to.

I. Armala, *Tarikh al-kanisa as-surianiyya* [History of the Assyrian Church], Manshurat Bet Zabday - Azach, Lebanon 1996, p. 369, writes: “Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) in the bull dated 7 July 1445 announced that the Assyrians who joined the Roman Church in Cyprus should call themselves the Chaldees. However, the name became popular only some 150 years later. Before that, they were referred to as ChaldoAssyrians. For the sake of accuracy it needs to be added that those of them who still live in villages near Mosul still call themselves the Assyrians.”

13 In order to avoid associations of this Uniate Church name with nationality I use the term “the Chaldees” instead of “the Chaldeans,” following the example of the terms “the Syriac Church, Syriacs” and “the Melkite Church, the Melkites” accepted in the oriental studies.
Europeans to establish Syrological centers of scholarship dealing with the history and intellectual legacy of their “forgotten brothers.”

A breakthrough came with the opening of a printing house in Rome, which came under the authority of the Collegium Romanum established in 1552. Pope Pius IV entrusted a Jesuit, Giovanni Battista Eliano \(^{14}\) with the running of the establishment. The first Arabic publication that came out of it (1566) was entitled at least ambiguously:  

\[ \text{روﻣﺎ} \] 

\[ \text{ﻟﻜﻨﻴﺴﺔ} \] 

\[ \text{اﻟرﺕﺪآﺴﻴﺔ} \] 

\[ \text{اﻟﻣﺎﻧﺔ} \] 

\[ \text{اﻋﺘﻘﺎد} \] 

– The Orthodox Faith of the Roman Church! Eliano himself is thought to be the author or the translator of the work. He is also thought to be the author of another embossed book based on a lecture on the rightness of the Christian religion using the same typeface: 

\[ \text{مﺻﺎﺣﺒﺔ} \] 

\[ \text{ﻋﺎﻟِﻤَﻴَﺔ} \] 

\[ \text{ﺏﻴﻦ} \] 

\[ \text{روﺣﺎﻧﻴﺔ} \] 

– An Intellectual Dispute between Two Scholars. \(^{15}\) Another Arabic book issued in the same year: the Archbishop of Valencia, Martin Perez de Ayala, allegedly wrote Doctrina Christiana en la lengua y castellana.

One of the first works rendered from Latin into Arabic was The Catholic Catechism by a Jesuit, Peter Cassius. It was prepared and printed in the Garshuni system (Arabic text written in the Syriac alphabet) by Eliano, and in May 1580 handed over to the Maronite Patriarch in Lebanon.

In order to accelerate the latinization of the Maronites Pope Gregory XIII set up the Maronite Collegium in Rome in 1584, at the same time entrusting the running of the Rome printing house to Cardinal Fernandes de Medicis. In his team, the Cardinal had an Italian orientalist, Giovanni Raimondi, whom he subsequently sent to the Middle East to bring manuscripts with a plan to Latinize their texts and in this way expand the offer targeted at the “newly recruited faithful.” At the same time a French artisan and printer, Robert Granion made new Arabic types in four different sizes and shapes. The Medicea printing house (Typographia Medicea) started operating by issuing a prayer book for the Maronites, encompassing a series of seven daily prayers (Liber VII Precationum). This was the second publication in the Garshuni system. A year later two more books were printed, one in the Syriac language on the liturgy of funerals, and the other one with a lay text: 

\[ \text{ﻓﻲاﻟﺒﺴ} \] 

\[ \text{Tﺎن} \] 

\[ \text{ﻋﺠﺎيـ} \] 

\[ \text{ﺋـ} \] 

\[ \text{ب} \] 

\[ \text{اﻷرض} \] 

\[ \text{والـ} \] 

\[ \text{لـ} \] 

– “The Garden of Wonders of the Earth and Countries.” \(^{16}\)

It seems the year 1584 was a breakthrough in the Typographia Medicea publication plans – lay books started to prevail. Using new types in the years 1586-1593 the printing house published in one book Avicenna’s Canon of

\(^{14}\) He stayed in the Middle East in the years 1578-1580 as the Pope’s official delegate. His extremely destructive activity was described by authors such as Armala, op. cit. p. 204; M. Moosa, The Maronites in History, Gorgias Press, 2nd ed., 2005, pp. 245-252; Ph. Terrazi, asdaaq ma kan ‘an tarikh lubnan wa safha min akhbar as-surian [The Most Trusted about the History of Lebanon and a Page of the Assyrian News], vol. I, Beirut 1948, pp. 94-100, 146-148.

\(^{15}\) As-Samarra’i, op. cit., p. 63, maintain that the contents of the book were clearly anti-Islamic and it was translated into English by William Bedwell (whom he calls „the father of the English oriental studies“) and published in the form of three brochures in the years 1615-1624.

\(^{16}\) Inaccuracies regarding the full first name and surname of the author and its spelling can be found in the literature. He probably lived in the 10th century Hijra.
Medicine together with his other selected works (picture 4). Almost paralleling (1591) four thousand copies of the New Testament were printed in two language versions, Arabic, and Arabic and Latin. A Maronite orientalist, Jibrail as-Suhiuni, made the Latin translation while the ornaments on the wooden blocks were the job of reportedly the most outstanding sculptor of that time by the name of Tempesta. The same Jibrail, working jointly with another Maronite orientalist, Yuhanna al-Hesruni, supervised the publication (1592) of A Guidebook of a Keen Traveler by Al-Idrisi, subsequently translated into Latin and published in Paris (1619) under the title Geographia Nubensis – The Geography of Nubia.17

The close of the 16th century saw the publication of further Arabic titles. In 1592 Typographia Medicea published three titles on the Arabic language and grammar: 1- كتاب اللغة العربية في اللحى by Ibn al-Hajib (died 1249), 2-الاجْرُوْمَة آتَاب by Sanhaji (died 1323)18 and 3- العربية اللغة المبدىء by G. Raimondi. It seems that the penultimate work (1594) was Euclid’s Elements as interpreted by a famous Persian mathematician Nasir ad-Din at-Tusi (died 1274), printed in the Turkish language with Arabic letters, a publication believed to be the first printed book in the Turkish language. The final pages of the book contain a decree (firman) of the Turkish Sultan Murad III dated 1587, permitting two anonymous Italian traders to sell goods and books in the lands under the Turkish rule. In 1595 by the order of Pope Clement VIII, an abridged version of the earlier mentioned book The Orthodox Faith of the Roman Church was published, this time translated by Eliano.

One cannot but mention also the printing house established by the Leiden University (the Netherlands) founded in 1575. The running of the house was entrusted to Franciscus Raphelengius, a teacher of Hebrew. Owing to his efforts A Primer of the Arabic language learning with the text of Psalm 50 was published in 1595, and in 1599 a letter by the Dutch Prince Cornelis de Houtman addressed to Dutch merchants intending to travel to the Far East was published in the Arabic version.

Printing of the Quran

The sources on printing industry in the 16th century mention one edition of the Quran in the Arabic language. There is no consensus between both European and Arab authors as to the year of its publication. Seven following dates are

17 The full spelling of the first name and surname of the author is: Abu Abdalla Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Idris (died 1165). He was born in Sicily. He wrote his book with an original title: كتاب في اختراع الاقاف [A Guidebook of an Explorer of the Horizons] in at the request of the King of Sicily, Roger II. The Latin version was translated into French, English and German. Only 11 copies have been reportedly preserved of the Arabic edition published in Rome, including one copy in the “Al-Babittin” library, founded by a connoisseur of antique books, Abd al-Aziz Su’ud in Kuwait.

18 The word adjurrum is of Berber origin and denotes as “an expert in law and mystic.” The author, a Berber was born and died in the city of Fes. The book was republished in 1841 in Beirut.
given 1499, 1508, 1518, 1537, 1538, 1530, 1538, though 1530 and 1537 appear most frequently. In addition, the place of issue is not quite certain. Out of the two: Rome and Venice, the latter is mentioned more frequently. The book was reportedly edited and printed by Alessandro Paganini.\(^{19}\) In addition, different opinions exist both on the target group of this printed edition and on what happened with it. An opinion prevails that the book actually never reached Muslim countries, and that it even never left Venice; according to some due to bad quality the whole edition was burnt in response to objections of Muslim clergy, others speculate that the burning was done for religious reasons as the book was listed on the index of prohibited books; there is also another theory according to which there were no buyers for the book as a result of a ban issued by Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512) on the use of Arabic types and printing of Muslim religious books.\(^{20}\) It is impossible to say definitely whether the ban on distribution issued by the Church referred specifically to this very edition of the Quran, or its Latin version published in Basel in 1543?\(^{21}\)

Summing up the output of the European printing houses in the Arabic and Syriac languages in the 16th century we obtain 24 books: 13 on lay topics (including on the language) and 11 on religious topics.

Jews expelled from Spain set up the first printing house in Constantinople in 1494. It used only Hebrew types. The first printing house in Palestine was opened in 1577 by Eliezer ben Icchak Ashkenazi\(^{22}\) of Lublin (Poland). Strangely enough, at that time there were no printing houses belonging to the Eastern Christians, even though part of them (Maronites and Melkites) had contacts with Europe and were acquainted with printed books. Considering Europe’s strong engagement in “the export” of the Latin model of Christianity at that time, this total absence of “Eastern-rite” printing houses could be explained with fear against issuing books at variance with the Roman Church rite. Lebanese


\(^{20}\) W. Qaddura, Awa’il al-matbu’at al-’arabiyya fi turkiyya wa bilad ash-sham [Early Arabic Publications in Turkey and the Levant], in: Naduat...[Symposium], op. cit., pp. 115-122, writes that the first Turkish printing house was opened in Constantinople in 1726 and it was fully controlled by the Sublime Porte, as the ban was still valid. He also reports that before the first Arabic book was published in the East as many as 167 Arabic titles had been published in Europe. Therefore, it is undeniable that it was Christians who were the pioneers of printing with Arabic letters in Middle East.


\(^{22}\) K. Pilarczyk, op. cit., p. 10.
Maronites in St. Anthony Monastery in the town of Qazhayya installed the first Christian Maronite printing house over 100 years after setting up the Jewish printing house in Constantinople. It was equipped only with Syriac types. However, the book of psalms printed by it in 1610 was not in line with the “Catholic” version and contained Psalm number 151. Chronologically, Melkite members of the Orthodox Church brought the second set of printing machines from present day Romania to Aleppo in 1706.

This sketch applies to the first printed books, both in Syriac and Arabic, using movable types. I concentrated mainly on the subject of the printed materials, and paid less attention to the developing of the shape and size of fonts in the sixteenth century. The monumental work of J. F. Cookley should be helpful for those interested in the history of Syriac fonts. The phenomenon, which I think deserves to be emphasized, is the usage of printing techniques by the Roman Church in the process of romanization of the persecuted Eastern Churches at a time when Inquisition raged in Europe.

![Picture 2: The first elements of the Arabic writing in Europe: The Arabic alphabet with phonetic transcription of sounds, Maintz, 1498](image)

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“In the name of the God Alive and Eternal. With the help of God Elevated and under His merciful eye, we start writing the [text of] nightly and daily prayers. The first one is the prayer towards the north. [By the power of] prayers of all our holy Fathers we cry: Our Lord, Jesus Christ, Our God, show us mercy. Amen.”

There are split words in the Arabic text (lines 3 and 6). This is probably a result of incorrect text layout.
On typography in the Arabic and Syriac languages and its pioneers in the 16th century

Picture 4: Avicenna’s Canon of medicine with the elements of logics, natural sciences and theology, Rome, 1593
The Female Voice in Rāwe: The Strive for Gender Equality

Nineb Lamassu §

“In my opinion, for a woman to be forward in expressing her feelings towards he whom she loves should not spoil her virtues but elevate her status through a freedom guarded with honor”

Susan Yosip Qasrayta 1

Scholars interested in the pre-Christian phase of Assyrian history and civilization, have managed to reveal new aspects of a misunderstood culture. What started as a mere curiosity of certain colonial officials has now evolved to a mature field of study, capable of addressing various aspects of this culture including gender and sexuality. 2 Scholars focusing on the post-Christian period of the Assyrians, however, have largely confined themselves to studying church history, theological disputes, and more recently the documentation and grammatical analysis of their various spoken dialects.

Academic discourse has thus divorced the field from the very people and culture that it studies. There have been few academic works dedicated to the study of the multifaceted and rich social history of the modern Assyrians. For example this writer knows of no in-depth study analyzing the Assyrian culture in the light of modern scholarly approaches to gender and sexuality studies. Despite increasing numbers of Assyrians conducting academic research, and a growing number of Assyrian female scholars, yet modern theories of gender and sexuality have rarely been pursued in this area.

In this paper we intend to isolate a single genre of the rich oral tradition of the modern Assyrians, and study the light that it sheds on the female role in the Assyrian culture. Although we cannot promise to offer a comprehensive feminist approach to modern Assyrian studies, we hope to provide an introduction to such an approach. It is time now for scholars to apply modern theories and approaches such as those dealing with gender and sexuality, to the study of the Assyrian social history.

This approach will not only enrich our knowledge of Modern Assyrian culture, but it should help elevate this field to the realm of modern theories and

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approaches. And presenting it as a mature academic field on a par with its sister fields in humanity studies.

**Professional Music and Poetry:**

Folk or professional music and poetry were generally despised among the Assyrians after they so zealously embraced Christianity. The following observation by a western Missionary working among the Assyrians of Urmia highlights how musicians were generally perceived (Write 1857, p. 77):

“There is no class of persons, among the Nestorians, more depraved and dissolute than professional musicians. They are called upon to take parts at weddings, and on festival occasions, among their own people, where drunkenness, revelry, and every form of iniquity, are practiced. Their services are also in demand among the Mussulmans, on similar occasions, and in assemblies of the loose and dissipated. Here, dancing boys, whose manners are indecent, are made to perform, and musicians are called upon to sing obscene songs. Nestorian musicians are thus trained in the very school of Satan himself.”

This perspective seems to extend beyond Christian fundamentalism to approach racist and orientalist fear of eastern cultures, a fear tinged with palpable hatred. But it may accurately reflect how a zealous Christian and western missionary saw and wanted to portray an Assyrian musician and her/his environment. It is also possible that it reflects how the community itself perceived its own musicians. To get a sense of how these musicians were perceived by their own community, it is necessary to briefly trace the history of Assyrian music and musicians’ post-Christian era.

**Early Christian Assyrians and Music:**

Upon embracing Christianity, the Assyrians made use of the musical tradition of their earlier religion and incorporated it into their churches and monasteries (Malke 2004, P. 26). According to Mor Ephrem Barsum (Barsum 1991, P. 70) this was done for three reasons, the most salient of which was that the church wanted “to rise against the music of the idol worshipers and heretics who were seeking to corrupt the hearts and minds of the youth with their beliefs and culture. They thus were combated with fine and cultured poetry that put an end to the corrupted poems.”

Mor Ephrem Barsum makes it clear that the “qīnaṯā” i.e. the melodies, were not replaced but the corrupted lyrics of the melodies – mēmrē mxablē – were replaced with fine and cultured poetry. This means that the church absorbed everything that was seen to be of pagan origin, and was consequently part of professional musical culture, and refined it to be incorporated into the new religious practices. This newly refined culture was then exported into the streets

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3 That is the earlier religion of the people.
and forced to replace the common lay culture of the people, according to Ya'qub Barṭillī: the psalms and other religious poetry were recited in the markets and streets, not just the churches and monasteries (Malke 2004, P. 27).

Religious music and poetry was fast flourishing and it was seen as an integral part of the curriculum in the religious schools and universities of Edessa and Nsībīn to mention but a few (Babu-Ishaq 2006, P. 63). St. Ephrem the great even authorized the participation of females in chanting religious melodies in churches and monasteries (Barsum 1991, P. 219). A form of the refined Christian music that was exported back to the laity has also survived in modern Assyrian oral literature in the form of Durākyāṯā, a genre which has recently been studied by Mengozzi.4

In Hakkari, we observe the presence of some sort of a secular literature that has survived orally, outside of church and monastery walls. The most important of which is the subject of this study, the poetic singing of Rāwe. There are indications that the clergy also participated in singing Rāwe. There is one particular verse which describes an incident where Mar Rouel Shimun - the patriarch of the Church of the East whose patriarchal seat was in Qutanis Hakkari, was present in a court of Rāwe singers in Asīṯā where he asked his religious advisor Rabban Younan Txumnaya5 to sing a verse of Rāwe and the rather disappointed monk responded with the following verse:

“Çexxā merēh tlā bāzā
Drilā gātuš gū rāzā6
Dūnyēlā u hadxā bdāzā”7

5 The last great monk of the Church of the East who is said to have possessed prophetic visions as attested in numerous writings. See for example: Odisho M. Gewargis Ashitha, *Guggi Am Syame Khreeene D’Rabban Shamasha Yaonan Tkhumnaya: Baghdad* (Baghdad: Matwa’tha D’Eetha D’Madinkha, 1997).
6 Most often pronounced as: rēża or rīža. The pronunciation here, “rāžā” is reflective of Rabban Younan Txumnaya’s own dialect – Txūmā - and in the context it tends to serve as a wordplay since rāžā also refers to the mystery of the Holy Mass.
7 Both Daniel Dawid Bet Benyamin, *Zmiratha D’Rawatha* (Chicago: Self-published, 1998), and Odisho M. Gewargis Ashitha and Susan Yosip Qasrayta, *Bahare D’Qinatha - Rawe* - (Baghdad: Al-Maghreb, 1998) document this verse. They both not only interpret it differently from each other but what they have documented slightly varies from what is documented here. It is the opinion of this writer that what is documented here is nearer to what Rabban Younan Txumnaya had composed since this version was relayed to him by the very family members of this mystic monk in Txūmā Gawāyā (Tell Hurmis), Khabour Syria 2009.
The crow said to the falcon
Squeeze yourself in to the queue
For such is the world and such it shall pass

The above verse could be construed as the men of cloth not only tolerating but also participating in singing Rāwe. Yet Rabban Younan Ṭxumnaya’s discomfort manifested in his poetic response, makes it clear that this was not fully accepted. His negative response was probably based on his broad knowledge of his Church’s canon laws. Through these we learn that: “the use of musical instruments was forbidden because they were considered to represent social inferiority so was the singing of females since it was seen to sexually arouse men (Malke 2004, P. 29).” The 18th canon of Bar Brikha’s Synodical Collection also makes it clear that it is not lawful for Christians to converse with women musicians and to drink with them (Bar Brikha 2006, P. 183), and without any doubt there would have been both women and wine present in the aforementioned gathering in Ašīṯā. We should thus perceive and study the female voice within Rāwe in this paradoxical context that consists of two negations: the oral heritage and culture of the people vs. the religious laws of the church: a milieu, which seems to have suppressed not only laity culture per se, but female poets and musicians in particular (i.e. female creativity).

What is Rāwe:

The first scholar to document this genre was Socin, but Pennacchietti was the first to attempt to etymologize the term “rāwe,” which according to him is derived from the Arabic َرَوِ. He postulates that it refers to “the letter which remains the same throughout the entire poem and binds the verses together...” (Pennacchietti 1985-1986). In agreement with Bet Benyamin (Bet Benyamin 1998), Ashitha and Qasrayta (Ashitha and Qasrayta 1998), and Youkhanna (Youkhanna 1998) we maintain that Rāwe is derived from the verbal root “rw’، َرَوِ” which generally means: to drink “water” until one is satiated, or to drink “wine” until one is inebriated, and can also have the following nuances: to passionately fall in love with someone, or to be in a state of rapture or ecstasy (cf. Arabic طَرِب). Considering that love and passion accounts for the majority of the Rāwe’s verses. Therefore, we too conclude that Rāwe is based on this verbal root.

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8 According to Sh. Gewargis D’bet Benyamin D’ashitha, Khayutha Gaw Tyare wu Lwar Men Tyare (Chigaco: Nineveh Press, 1982) the Synodical canons were adhered to in Hakkari up to the very minute detail.
In terms of antiquity of Rāwe, Pennacchietti sees it as “extremely old” for having already lost some of its meaning among the Nestorians of Persia, and the Jacobites of Ṭūr ‘Abdin (Pennacchietti 1985-1986). Through the references made to certain known historical events in Rāwe, one can safely trace some of its verses to more than two hundred years back in history (Bet Benyamin 1998, Ashitha and Qasrayta 1998). It may be that the origin of this rich heritage extends even further back in antiquity. Without expressing certainty, we would like to present a tentative theory of the genre’s origins or at least postulate one possible source of influence.

Ancient Roots of Rāwe

Much of the ancient Assyrian literature was orally preserved and made it into the written literature of the surrounding peoples. For example, T. J. Meek argued that the Song of Songs is a Hebrew echo of Mesopotamian myths and rituals, a view that was later elaborated by S.N. Kramer (Longman 2001, p. 44). Brock has also demonstrated the connection between Syriac dispute poems and Mesopotamian poetic traditions (Brock 1991). This writer has also recently established the possible survival of the Gilgamesh epic through the modern Assyrian oral epic of Qatīne (Lamassu in publication I).

The nearest precedents we have found for Rāwe from the pre-Christian period come from the Neo-Assyrian literary record. One tablet that has made it to us seems to be a sort of a library catalogue listing the titles of some 400 love songs. If these 400 odd love songs were part of a literary lore that enjoyed popularity in the Neo-Assyrian period, it would be very possible that it survived into the oral literature of the area. One rather fragmentary tablet, for example, alludes to the nature of ancient songs: “O young man, love me,” “I smile at the lusty shepherd,” and “I will let you stay the night, young man” (Leick 1994, p. 176). Hopefully, further excavations will yield similar tablets and enhance our understanding of this genre.

Who Sings Rāwe:

It is generally believed among Assyrians that Rāwē was only sung by the Ṭyari, Txūmā and Berwārī clans (Bet Benyamin 1998). This is probably due to the fact that its survival in modern times is restricted to these three communities. As noted earlier, Pennacchietti postulates that it may have existed among the communities of Persia and Ṭūr ‘Abdin. We have previously argued for the practice of Rāwe among other Assyrian tribes of the Hakkari region like the Jēlwāye and Bāznāye, and even outside the Hakkari region like the plains of Nineveh (Lamassu in publication II).

In terms of the gender of the singers and composers, one redactor reports that: “Rāwe is sung in the evening gatherings in the villages, the gatherings usually consist of local male villagers, possibly guests from outside the village, with women too participating in such gatherings ...”. In their impressive book Bāhāre D’Rāwāthā which serves as an exemplary work in documenting Rāwe, Ashitha and Qasrayta listed the names of the Rāwe singers which they recorded in order to document the genre. They list sixty-four Rāwe singers among whom
only one Šamīrām Ya’qub Būzū is a female, that is only 1.563% of the total. This may imply that the percentage of female Rāwe singers was very small and insignificant, but it could also reflect the changing times and a change in settlement settings. In all the recordings heard by this writer, the informants were adamant that traditional Rāwe gatherings were very mixed and evenly split in gender, and the current imbalance is due to the urbanization of the people and the loss of their rural environment with the introduction of radio and television. Nevertheless, one female and sixty three men among a total of sixty four singers is a strikingly low number, and must not be ignored when addressing the female voice in Rāwe.

To trace the presence of the female voice in this vast corpus of literature is not an easy task. There is a paucity of works that can’t be safely attributed to women – both because folk literature doesn’t often preserve the name of its author and the possibility that few women may have been participating in singing Rāwe.

To deal with these obstacles, we will briefly summarize some themes of Rāwe, and distinguish between the clearly female and those which are overtly male verses.

First, we should describe the difference between male and female markers in Assyrian. Rāwe is written in Modern Assyrian, a Semitic language, which clearly marks the difference between male and female in both the declination of the nouns and the conjugation of the verbs. This linguistic gender marker renders it easy to separate the male verses from the female ones. To do this, we will strictly work with Bet Benyamin’s book Zmīrāṭa D’Rāwāṭā.9 The book has two hundred and fifteen verses, seventy five of which are clearly male verses, hundred and twelve are female verses and twenty eight are neutral in gender. In terms of percentage this would mean 52.094% are Female, 13.023% are Neutral and only 34.883% are male verses. By comparison, Ashitha and Qasrayta had documented only 1.563% of singers of Rawe as female. This raises two questions: is the current gender imbalance among the number of Rāwe singers a recent development? Or, are the 52.094% of female verses recorded by Bet Benyamin really examples of verses with a passive female voice? That is, are these ‘female voices’ to be taken as mere expression of male desires disguised in a female voice or maybe a-male expressions of female feelings shared with their male partners in private moments of intimacy? Whatever we take them to represent be it a female voice or not, we must define the nuances we load this term with, and how we recognize and isolate it from the male verses.

What we take here to mean a “male verse,” are those verses where the grammar clearly marks the speaker as a male or the addressee as a female. For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mammekkā xwārē xľūşē} \\
\text{Gāw Šadrā berye truşē} \\
\text{mūxerwīlā bmmmūşē}
\end{align*}
\]

9 Bet Benyamin, Zmiratha D'Rawatha.
Her hard and white breasts
Were made to fit her chest perfectly
She now has had them ruined through suckling

Mammekkā xwārē xzāylī
Grīšli zīqā u mākūšāylī
Lā nhīlā lī d’māgūlāylī

I saw her white breasts
I pulled up her shirt and covered them
I couldn’t bear to have them exposed

These two verses are taken to represent a male verse although the grammar doesn’t make this clear. This choice is then based on the nature of their content and implications. In the first verse, the speaker’s masculinity is recognized by the fact that he reminisces about the female’s beautiful bosoms and then laments the fact that they have now been spoiled by her becoming a suckling mother. The second verse too, it is not the grammar that determines the identity of the speaker but the fact that the speaker having exposed the bosoms of his beloved – almost with childlike innocence refrains from going any further, and covers them back again.

In the following triplet though, the case is different:

Kūl qaydāmtā dqaymenwā
ṭū pāmtā lē ḫǣxlenwā
Maqṭā ḍṣādrā nāšqenwā

Every morning as I would wake up
Even before I would have my breakfast
I would kiss in-between her breasts ¹⁰

¹⁰ That is every morning even before having his necessary nutrition that would help him sustain throughout the day’s toil, he would much rather indulge in intimacy with his female partner.
In this verse the masculinity of the speaker is determined via the masculine conjugation of the verbs i.e. the subject of the sentence: nāšqenwā instead the feminine conjugation nāšqanwā, and the female gender of the object of the sentence: dšadrē instead of the masculine dšadrēh.

This same methodology is then applied in selecting the verses which we perceive to be of a female subject:

rēxāntā d’eqer nātē
āzā u ātyā b’šāmātēh
kəmā d’kāmšā rēhā ātē

The basil sprig that sets behind his ear
Flapping around his auditory area
The more it dries the more fragrant it gets

Zəmmūddī d’šammānnēh qālūx
Dxūddī xūš ātyān l’bālūx
l’hāw yāwma dīwānāw yārūx

Sing for me so I hear your voice
Remember me, let me come to your thoughts
For the sake of the old times when I was your lover

Here the first verse is recognized as a-feminine because of the nature of the observation and the second verse because of the clear grammatical linguistic markers: ātyān and d’šammānnē instead of the masculine ātēn, and d’šammīnē.

The neutral voice refers to those triplets where we can not quite determine the gender of the speaker. The gender of the person in question, however, is often made clear. These are predominantly those triplets referring to the third person.

The following verse for example makes it clear that the third person in question is female but the speaker can easily be both male and/or female:

Kaššē wā wā max be’tā
Brēšā lā klēlē šētā
Zēllē xzē lē xdā xētā
She was as white/fair as an egg  
He did not even last a year with her  
He took off and went with someone else

**The Voices:**

Having discussed the methodology in dividing the verses into gender specific sections, we encounter another hurdle, namely, how should we read the voices? Are the voices of these Female Verses reflective of ‘female consciousness or can they be legitimately described as ‘female voices’? Borrowing Keohane et al.’s (1982: ix-x) analysis, we use the term ‘feminine’ consciousness as one where a woman defines herself in the context of the male gaze, construct, and desire.

Pāyšān wā tūpēh kriṭā  
Bū rūšēh ḏ’chappe tlīṭā  
Malwūli gū qārīṭā

If only I was his short shotgun  
Hanging on his left shoulder  
And he would roll me up in the sealing-beams\textsuperscript{11}

‘Female’ consciousness on the other hand implies consciousness about women as life-givers and life-sustainers. This is best expressed in the following verse where the female is aware of her role as a life-giver and is conscious of how she can utilize it to manipulate her lover/husband, if not in society at least in the privacy of sexual intercourse with her partner:

\textsuperscript{11} Every Assyrian man would have had a shotgun, and shotguns were very much treasured by their owners not only because they were highly priced but due the fact that they were essential in protecting the family and its estates. Thus the male would often spent most of his time caring for his weapon and would often conceal it within the sealing-beams of the house to safe guard it from robbery. This very poetic verse has the very jealous female-lover begging for her male-beloved to neglect his shotgun and invest similar interest in her for a change.
Qurrā lā hwī bādilmāe
Dī xlūs lē daʾāwēr spāe
Dəlā bāʾez u āzēl zāʾē 12
صموحة كسموحة
مسموحة يمسوحة
جئش يجمئش
Lad don’t you be grieved/disappointed
Squeeze it then, so it penetrates well
And does not spill and be gone to waste13
‘Feminist” consciousness on the other hand is aware of the structural
subordination of the female sex. For example:
Yālā lā ′ūd lā bəmēntā
Xū lē wān bəzūzūx zwīntā
Kūl mūnšūqti bəkūdīntā
شکم شكدمة كمة مكتمة
سممة سممة وجميمة
حجد حجدب حجميدبة
Lad don’t you make it as though it is a favor
Why, were I purchased with your money
Every single kiss of mine equals a mule14
Keohane et al. also make it clear that at any given moment more than one, if
not all three levels of consciousness, might coexist. This is best exemplified in
the following verse:

12 zāʾē is corruption of an Arabic loanword ضائع which must have been borrowed either
through Kurdish or Persian ضائع pronounced زاهع.
13 It is generally believed that coitus interruptus is probably the oldest form of
contraception. We are told in Genesis 38:8-10 that this was a wicked act and the Lord
condemned Onan to death for committing such an act with Tamar. Is this an indication
that Assyrian women were aware of this scriptural verse? With such knowledge the
Assyrian woman reversed the gender imbalance of her society within the confines of her
bedroom. Here she displayed her prowess as the primary procreative agent whose refusal
to coitus completus can lead to the very death of her partner.
14 Mules’ worth was very much appreciated and they were highly priced as useful beasts
of burden. See D’ashitha, Khayutha Gaw Tyare wu Lwar Men Tyare.
Go on look at me and see how equal I am to you
Go on and wrap me into your arms (lit. chest)
Go on and kiss me whom is it that you fear

Here the female is set to seduce the masculine ‘other’, eager to gain his attention, and defines herself in the context of his gaze - Dī rhī bī / go on look at me, yet makes that statement with full awareness of her structural subordination which she refutes by claiming to be his equal - kmāywān baqādrūx / see how equal I am to you. It is only then that she seeks to indulge in love making, and proclaim her prowess as a life giver and life sustainer. Perhaps the most striking part of this verse would be the very last line: Dī nšūqlī m’mānī šādlūx/ go on and kiss me whom is it that you fear. Here the usual role is reversed. Instead of the female being shy and fearful of her closed societal environment, she implies that her male counterpart is in fact shyer and she encourages him to rebel against their patriarchal society.

Conclusion:

These female voices do not come down to us in an unmediated form. These voices do not always exist in a pristine women’s world, completely untouched by the patriarchal world around them. Therefore, they can be retrieved only in the context of those myriad influences, which react and re-react upon them. After all, whether it is feminine, female or feminist response, it is often a response to the patriarchal/masculine ‘other’.

It is quite possible that women were articulating their desires even if they were aspiring for male love. In the context of patriarchy, with its ideology of repressing all expressions of female sexuality, the very act of articulation rendered these female verses in Rāwe as subversive. Our analysis of the female voice in Rāwe leads us to the conclusion that though one has to consider the possibility that the female Rāwe singers may have been few in number and even though ‘female’ verses may not always be easily ascribed to women today, they nevertheless can be read as subversive voices against existing patriarchal social norms. This enables scholars to analyze and appreciate the reality of women’s life in the modern Assyrian culture and the Middle East in general.
LIST OF REFERENCES:

Lamassu, Nineb, ‘What can the Songs of the Assyrian Mountaineers Tell us about their Composers?’ *Aram*, XXI (2009 (In Publication II)).


Introduction

Before the First World War, and the tragic consequences that would brutally alter the Christian map of the Middle East, there lived in the mountainous region of Hakkārī (today in the south-east of Turkey on the boarders with Iran and Iraq) a tightly concentrated community of Nestorian Christians whom we have come to know as ‘Assyrians’.

Their quasi-autonomous tribes were spread across the east and west of the Upper Zāb in Çölemerik (today Hakkārī) in the north, and Berwārī, Amādīyā in the south. They were divided into two classes – ‘freemen’ or āšîtreṭē and ‘vassals’ or rāḥatṭē. The former consisted of five great clans: the largest among them was the Tiyārī, whose members comprised around one half of the Hakkārī Assyrians. They were based in Tšambā d-Mālek on the Upper Zāb which possessed the celebrated shrine of Mār Sābā. Extending from north to south was the smaller tribe of Dez, whose members were responsible for the protection of the Nestorian patriarch; the great tribe of Djīlū was based in Māṯā (village) d-Mār Zēyā, which contained the church of its saint and the residence of the bishop; Bāz, for whom the chief town was Māṯā d-Bāz; and Tḥūmā whose principle village was Tḥūmā Gaḥyā. The inhabitants of the districts of Tāl (Tḥūmā), Wālī (Upper Tiyārī), Aṣītā (Lower Tiyārī) and Eṣṭāzin or Lesser Djīlū were all subjects of these clans.

One opinion prevailed among authors who studied these tribes, most notably those Anglican missionaries who lived among them. According to the most representative of them, Rev. Percy Badger (author of the well documented The Nestorians and their Rituals), the arrival of Nestorian colonies in Kurdistan took place following the ravages of the Mongol invasions, and more probably in the 14th century during the time of Tamerlane:

“...and I am inclined to believe that previous to that period there were no Christians inhabiting the district. Had it been otherwise we should certainly find...”

§ Salam Rassi is an independant scholar who recently completed an MA in Christianities of Asia and Africa at the School of Oriental and Africa Studies. He is currently undertaking research into the writings of 'Āḥḏīšō' of Nisibis before beginning his doctoral studies in 2010.
2 There were also Christians in the region further north, up until Baš Qalā, and further east and west. The focus of this study, however, is purely on the group defined in this paper.
some account of them in the more ancient histories of this sect; but among the
many catalogues of the Nestorian bishoprics still extant there is not one mention
of those now existing in Coirdistan proper. Moreover there are no architectural
or other monumental records in the mountains which argue in their behalf a
greater antiquity of residence than the period generally assigned to them."³

If correct, the Christianisation of this part of the mountainous zone – which
according to Badger had been ‘thinly populated’ prior to the Timurid onslaught⁴
– happened at a late date. This would place the northernmost confines of the
Church of the East before the 14th century no further than what is today the Iraqi
frontier. My sole objection to Badger’s reasoning is that no historical document
contains an account of such mass migration to Hakkārī. Instead, he cites as
evidence the decline of Nestorian literature in the 14th century, which, he argues,
‘…goes to establish that era as their true flight into Coirdistan…’⁵

To support his thesis, we would have to call upon the testimony of some
Assyrian families who retained (reconstructed?) memories of their ancestors’
migrations. Mālek Tšikkō Gīyō left a record of his family’s displacements dating
from their departure from Arbil in 1310 to their arrival in Bēṭ Margō in 1765.
The ancestors of Qāshā Dānīel d-Bāz also came from Arbil, while the Qelāytās
took their name from the citadel of that city. Other members of the Bāz tribe
originated from Tikrīt and Dūrā ‘Arbāyā (ad-Dūr) in the north of Samarra. Over
the course of their exodus, a great many of their number abandoned their religion. The Djlū
of Mār Zēyā (with the exception of the family of the bishop, Mār Sarkīs, who came from
Alqōš) originated from ‘Aynkāwā, which their ancestor Hāj bar Hāj had left only twelve
generations previously, some three-hundred years ago.

While this may be true of a relatively exceptional number of groups, such
individual cases of northward migration do not by any means rule out
the pre-existence of indigenous Christians in the region.

Leaving aside for the moment those newcomers, are we able to argue the
case for a more ancient Christian presence in Hakkārī? In order to do so, we must
reconsider Badger’s arguments by reviewing the available evidence. Are the
catalogues of bishops truly silent as Badger would have us believe? And do the
Christian monuments, together with their local legends, give us any indication?
We shall examine these points one after the other.

The Ecclesiastical Geography of Hakkārī

The 14th century Nestorian dioceses extant in Hakkārī are known to us:⁶

³ George Percy Badger, The Nestorians and their Rituals with the Narrative of a Mission
⁵ Ibid., vol. I, p.257.
⁶ Listed by Badger in ibid., vol. I, pp. 392-99 and Jacques Rhetoré in his hand written
notes in the archives of the Mosul Mission.
The Christian Pre-History of Turkish Hakkâr

The Berwârî of Amâdiyâ, in the southwest, comprised the districts of HŞapnâ, Nerwa and Berwârî Bâlâ.

The patriarchal diocese – consisting of a large band spanning the two rivers of the Zâb – comprised western Gêrêsnâyê, namely the district east of Aştâ (Halmûn and Gêrâmûn) governed by the paşâlik of Mosul. To the west, Lower Tiyârî (Aştâ, Sâlâbakkân, Zernî Lizân), Upper Tiyârî (together with the canton of Mâr Sâbâ and Wâlțô), the Dez region east of the Zâb and the Berwâr of Qudşânês, Sevînê, Saûta and Bilidnâyê west of the Zâb in Çölemerik, were flanked by the districts Nordûz and Lewûn.

The diocese of the Djîlû (east of the patriarchal diocese) spanned north to south of the districts of Tšâl and Rêkân, which belonged to the tribes of Tûmûn, Baz and Dîlû.

The diocese of Gâbâr encompassed the northern and eastern confines of the region from Albâq, around Baş Qalâ, descending southeast towards the Gâbâr plain and ending at Derênâyê, where the village of Marbûc lay.

Finally, the diocese of Bêt Şamsdin (Shemdinân) and Şapat was confined to Azerbaijan and the diocese of Urmî.

How did all this translate into ancient Christian geographical terms? We will start with the extreme west.

Bâ Nûhadrâ

A basic point of reference is provided by the history of Sâhdônâ. Halmûn, of which he was a native, formed part of Bâ Nûhadrâ, that is to say the vast province which began south in the Upper Zâb and passed through Mosul/Nineveh along the Tigris towards the mountains. We see here that the northwest of Bâ Nûhadrâ extended beyond Amâdiyâ to the Halmûn-Gêrâmûn district, situated west of Aştâ. Confirmation is provided by the Life of Rabban Yûsif Bûsnaya, in which we learn of a monk who travels to Dâsen from his monastery in Bêt Sayyârî in Sapnâ, thus indicating that Sapna is not situated in Dâsen. We may also add that ‘on the way to Dâsen, one encounters a great river’. This river could be none other than the Zâb, which would mean that the country to the west of it was part

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7 Isû-Denah, Ms. Strasbourg 4.129, Liber castitatis, id est historia abbatum et monasteriorum orientalium, text no. 128.
9 As has already been noted, this region formed part of the paşâlik of Mosul much later than the 14th century. In Gerâmûn (Gêramas in Kurdish) the church was dedicated to S. John the Arab, qv. J.M. Fiey, ‘Diptyque nestoriens du XIVe siècle’, Analecta Bollandiana, 81 (1963), pp. 371-413; 396 and 401.
of Bā Nūhadrā.

We are therefore able to conclude that the first diocese in the preceding list – the Berwārī of Amādīyā –, and the western portion of the patriarchal diocese, formerly constituted part of the great ecclesiastic province of Bā Nūhadrā.

Dāsen and Bēṯ Tūrē

Continuing east, we see that the whole area contained within the buckle of the Zāb – roughly corresponding to the patriarchal province of the last century, but extending further south – was formerly known in ecclesiastical history as Dāsen and Bēṯ Tūrē (the mountainous country).

The southern confines of Dāsen are well documented; I have shown elsewhere\(^\text{11}\) that Margā was linked to Dāsen by the Nahāl\(^\text{12}\) and Talānā valleys, having passed from one jurisdiction to another in the 8th century.\(^\text{13}\) However, these valleys are now located, running on from one another, behind the ‘Aqrā range. Therefore Dāsen began in the southern Zāb (where modern-day Zibār\(^\text{14}\) is situated) and continued northwards to include the patriarchal province of the 14th century.

One of the lesser known villages of ancient Dāsen is Ōrē of Bēṯ Gawzā.\(^\text{15}\) It is situated in the upper Berwārī region, in the southwest Ašīṭā; one could still see walnut trees there during P. Rhétoré’s visit in 1889. Ōrē should be located around the edges of Dasēn, which is where the zōzān of Ašīṭā began.

As for the full name of the ancient Dāsen and Bēṯ Tūrē bishopric, it may be found in the History of Bar ‘Idtā, in which a bishop named Mbāraḵ is said to have been appointed to this see in the sixth century.\(^\text{16}\)


\(^{14}\) We see here that the rivers did not constitute a ‘natural confine’ for the ancient inhabitants of the region. On the contrary, the geographical unit was more often seen as the valley uniting the banks of the river.


\(^{16}\) E. A. Wallis Budge, The Histories of Rabban Hörmīzd the Persian and Rabban Bar-‘Idtā (New York: 1976), vol. II, p. 224, where ‘Margā’ should be read ‘Adiabene,’ since Yūnāḏāb was metropolitan of this province. Margā itself was never a metropolitanate.
Where in the east did Dāsen end, and which diocese did it neighbour? The Christian sources are not sufficient enough to determine this. All we are able to infer from the *Liber Castitatis* – where we learn that the great monastery of Mār Qardāg, founded by Ḫosʾzḵā on mount Ḥewtōn and Bēṯ Bgāš, is that Bēṯ Bgāš was a neighbouring district of Ḥewtōn. The latter district is known to us: it is situated in the northwest of Adiabene, east of the Zāb facing the ‘Aqrā plain, and continues further north.

A passage in Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī’s *Mu’jam al-buldān* may provide us with some clarification, if at first we are able to clarify the passage itself. Here he informs us that Babgāš is a “district situated between Azerbaijan and Ardabil, through which the Upper Zāb flows.” His mention of Ardabil appears to have been redacted by modern writers, since Ardabil is found in Azerbaijan, far from the Upper Zāb. Thus Barbier de Maynard renders the name ‘Irbil’ in his French translation of the text. The same mysterious ‘Irbil’ is found again in de Maynard’s *Dictionnaire de la Perse* under the entry Bast, of which he writes: ‘A river which flows from Azerbaijan and passes through the city of Irbil’, citing the *Marāsid al-iṭṭilā‘*21. In fact, we find a village named Ardvāl on the maps (spelled Ardabīl on an unedited map produced by Qāšā Yūsip d-Qalāyī for the Assyrian school in Mosul). This village is precisely located by a water current (the Bast of the *Marāsid*?), referred to here as Nahr Šamdīnān, which ‘flows from Azerbaijan’ and rejoins the Zāb roughly at a mid-distance between Amādīyā and Zibār. Ardvāl is actually found in Iraq immediately on the Turkish border, south of Mt. Djlū. If correct, Bēṯ Bgāš emerges as the region between Dāsen and Azerbaijan, the closest dioceses to which were Bēṯ Rustāqā, around Ushnū and Urmi.

Further evidence is provided by the existence of the village of Zārnē in Lower Djlū, in the Bnēmāyē district, were we are able to identify Zārn in Bēṯ Bgāš mentioned by Thomas of Margā. It is meanwhile necessary to distinguish

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17 Isū-Denah, *Liber castitatis*, text no. 47.


19 Between lake Urmi and the Caspian Sea, at a nearer distance to the former.


21 Ibid., p. 100. It was thought that Dabīl was also found here, but it is mentioned by Yāqūt as Dwīn, cf. Ibid, p. 240.

22 It features on the Arabic and English maps of the *Direction de la Topographie Irakienne* and on a French map of the Levant, but I was unable to consult any of the English maps.

this Zārn from Zērē or Zērīŋ, one of the principle villages of the Upper Djīlū, whose inhabitants were known as Zērīyē, which seems to have provided Pognon with the probably incorrect reading of ‘Zarzirāyē.’ The learned diplomat claimed to have found mention of a bishop of ‘Bgāș and the Zāriyē’ in a liturgical book. Unfortunately, we are unable to verify this claim.

In Bgāș we also find the ‘monastery of Bēṯ Bgāș’ founded by Mār Šimʿūn, disciple of Mār Yonān the Slave. Could the church of Kattūnā in Šemdinān on the Turco-Iranian frontier have been dedicated to Mār Šimʿūn? Shaykh ‘Ubaydallah (d. 1803) destroyed the church and scattered the bones of the saint. A later tradition identifies this Mār Šimʿūn as the patriarch Šimʿūn bar Sabbāʾē, a native of Kattūnā(?).

There was another village which may help us locate Bēṯ Bgāș – Bēṯ Asa of the Gūgma district. Unfortunately, the two are no longer extant.

Finally, authors are unable to agree on the location of the church of Bai, seat of the bishops of Bēṯ Bgāș. Their suggestions do not seem convincing to me, but I am unable to offer a better proposal.

The name Bēṯ Bgāș says little to the modern Assyrians. For them, the Upper Dāsen encompassed not only the Tiyārī, Thūmā, Bāz and Dez, but also the Djīlū, so that it seemed in ancient times that the latter region was divided between Dāsen and Bēṯ Bgāș. As for Lower Dāsen, the modern Assyrians have no further knowledge of where it was situated and suggest Şayḵan, which does not seem to correspond with the ancient geography of this region.

In addition, we know that the Assyrians never refer to one another as dasnāyē, instead reserving this term for the Yeẓīdis.

The Catalogues of Bishops

In the previous chapter, we have attempted to place the Assyrian districts of Hakkaṛī in the ancient dioceses, particularly Dāsen and Bēṯ Bgāș. We find further evidence in the catalogues of bishops that these regions were inhabited by Christians well before the 14th century.

For Dāsen, an article entitled Beth Dasen by M. le Chan. A. Van Lantschoot in the Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques gives a list of the names of eight bishops whose tenures spanned the 5th to 13th centuries and states

25 Isū-Denah, Liber castitatis, text no. 72.
26 There was also a church of Simon bar Sabbāʾē in Mabbūwa in Upper Tiyārī, one in Bēridā in Thūmā, one in Gābār, etc.
27 Budge, The Histories... vol. II, p. 267, not to confused with other Bēṯ Asas, notably the one where Bāḫai founded a school. In his preface, Addai Scher, Shuhadāʾ al-mashriq (Mosul: 1902-1906), vol. I places it in the district of Dašt Ḥāran, some thirteen hours from Arbil. Perhaps he is referring to Batās in Ḥarīr?
that the bishopric was still in existence at beginning of the 14th century, during the time of ‘Abdišo’ of Nisibis.29 We may add to this list the name of the bishop, Mbarak, which features in the History of Bar ‘Idtā, thus at the end of the 6th century. What interests us here is that the diocese had existed since 410. Its bishop, Ahadbu, was confirmed by canon XXI of the Synod of Isaac.

As for Bêt Bagas, the article devoted to it in the Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie écclésiastiques30 gives a very incomplete list. I must therefore turn to the Synodicon Orientale, where Chabot gathers a list of bishops from 410 to 605,31 and Oriens Christianus, in which Le Quien compiles another list of six bishops dating from 720 to 1265.32 Using the sources cited by these authors, we shall proceed to add additional names. The seat of Bêt Bagas appears to have existed before the fifth century, but it is only then that we find the first mention of it.

Barinos – This bishop had already held the seat of Bêt Bagas before the Synod of Isaac in 410, at which he assisted in the proceedings.33 His bishopric was therefore arranged among the suffragans of the Metropolitan of Adiabene.

Mārē – assisted at the synod of Dafišō in 424.34

Afrahāṭ – signed the Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 486 and was present (at least in the beginning) at the Synod of Bābai in 497. For reasons not immediately relevant here, he was not present at the time of the ratification, and it was his notary, Hawah (?), who, on his orders, signed on his behalf.35

Moses – has his name among the Fathers of the Synod of Aba I in 544.36

Timothy – is among the signatories of the Acts of the Synod of Isy’yaḥ I in 588 and Gregory I in 605.37

Diodorus and ‘Abdišo’ – Both were old monks at Bêt Abê.38 Levanq places them after Mark, attested to in 893.39 This cannot be possible, as they are mentioned by Thomas of Margā who wrote c. 840. Given the way in which

32 Michel Le Quien, Oriens christianus in quatuor patriarchatus digestus : quo exhistentur ecclesiae, patriarchae, caeterique praesulis totius orientis, (Graz: 1917), vol. II, col. 1221-4. Le Quien places Bêt Bagas in the diocese of Mosul although he cites Bar Hebraeus (via the Biblioteca orientalis) in order to situate it in the mountain of Arbil.
34 Chabot, Syn. Or., p. 285.
36 Ibid., p. 344, no. 3, p. 51, no. 12.
37 Ibid., p. 423, no. 8, 78, no. 11.
Thomas writes about these two, one feels that he is unsure about the era in which they flourished. I have placed them here in order to fill the lacunae in our list of bishops for the 12th century. Providing their reigns were not too long, it would be also possible to place them in the 13th century; though in this case Thomas probably identified them in relation to other persons of whom he had specific knowledge.

Yoḥannān – Disciple of his famous uncle ‘Ananišō‘ and Isō‘yāḇ of Bēṯ Āḇē (the former was author of the well known Paradise). Yoḥannān was the abbot of Bēṯ Āḇē and then bishop of Bēṯ Bgāš before being appointed by the patriarch, Sīḥā Zḵā, metropolitan of Adiabene sometime between 714 and 728.40

Šīmʿūn – Thomas of Margā refers to him as the ‘master of saints’. It was he who, during his time teaching at the school of Šalmat, built a church there in which Mār Aḥḥā was buried. Šīmʿūn would be appointed bishop of Bēṯ Bgāš by Mārān ‘Emmeh when the latter become metropolitan of Adiabene between 754 and 773. He reigned for only three years and would be buried in the church of Bai.41

George – The uncle of the patriarch Timothy and his mentor.42 When his famous pupil had completed his studies, George, due to his advanced years, gave his resignation to the metropolitan, Māran ‘Emmeh, and had his nephew take his place as bishop.

Timothy the Great – After succeeding his uncle George, he occupied the see of Bēṯ Bgāš until his turbulent election to the patriarchate in 780.43

Šīmʿūn – had probably succeeded Timothy to the see of Bēṯ Bgāš. The patriarch sent him a letter, unfortunately lost, in 795/6.44

Mark – On the day of his enthronement on July 15 890, the new patriarch, John III, transferred Mark from his seat in Bēṯ Bgāš to that of the metropolitanate of Ray.45 The Tables of Eliyā of Damascus,46 which date from the same period, mention Bēṯ Bgāš among the bishoprics dependent on Mosul.


Ṣaḇrīšo’ – a monk of Mār Miḵā’l. He was appointed to the see of Bēṯ Bgāš by the patriarch Eliyā II, thus between 1111 and 1132. 'Amr ibn Mattā (Ar.) in *Gismondi, Patriarchis Nestorianorum*, p. 104; Mār ibn Sulaymān (Lat.) in *Ibid*, p. 130; Assemani, *B.O.*, vol. III/I, p. 449, Quien, *Oriens christianus*, no. 5; Levenq, 'Bêth Bagas', no. 8.

Denḥā (?) – The future patriarch Denḥā I was born in Bēṯ Bgāš, according to his panegyrist, the monk Yoḥannān. J. B. Chabot, *Éloge du patriarche nestorien Mar Denha Ier* (Paris 1895), p. 125. In fact in the Ushnu region, considered to have been part of Azerbaijan.

Īšō’zḵā – This bishop was present at the enthronement of the Patriarch, Denḥā I in 1265.

Subsequent to this last date, we have no further knowledge of the bishops of Bēṯ Bgāš. We are aware, however, that the diocese continued to exist at least up until the 14th century where we find it in a catalogue left by ‘Abdišō of Nisibis. It does not appear to feature anymore in the 1607 and 1610 catalogues of Eliyā VIII.

**The Christian Monuments Speak**

The catalogues of bishops take us as far back as the fifth century. The legends of particular saints in the region, on the other hand, allow us to go back even further. Suffice to say, these legends do not provide us with the same accuracy as a historical document, and the period in which their heroes lived is sometimes deliberately altered. Nevertheless, successive generations have maintained that such men were the founders of their churches or their most celebrated countrymen, and the majority gave their names to the villages where their relics lay.

**Mār Sāḇā**

‘Sāḇā’ is an epithet applied to anyone of venerable age. The sanctuary of Mār Sāḇā, on the banks of the Zāb in Tšamba d-Mālek in Tiyārī was reputed to

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48 It is unknown whether this monastery was that of Mosul or Tar’il.
50 J. B. Chabot, *Éloge du patriarche nestorien Mar Denha Ier* (Paris 1895), p. 125. In fact in the Ushnu region, considered to have been part of Azerbaijan.
have been the most celebrated in the region. But are we able to identify this saint as a historical figure?

There existed a number of personages who went by the name ‘Sāḇā’, which is commonly applied to anyone considered to be an ‘elder’, that is to say an old monk (in a similar sense to the *staretz* of the Russian tradition). An East Syrian hagiography recalls two in particular: Sāḇā Piguršnap, a child of 12 and son of exiles from Bēṯ Zabdai who was martyred by Šapūr II in Ahwāz on 16 August; and a monk, Sāḇā Güsnazdād, whose activities seemed to have taken place in the vicinity of the river Diyālā, viz. Bēṯ Lašpar and Šahrzūr in Bēṯ Garmai, where he converted a number of Kurds and built many churches. He died in 485 or 488.

At the end of an Arabic translation of the above summary, A. Scher lists six churches which carry the name of one of the Mār Sāḇās, without specifying which, in Qūḏšānē, in the region currently under study. To this we may also add the great church of the village of Awrusā in Gāḇār, the place where a manuscript containing the history of the monk was produced and which served as the basis for Bedjan’s publication.

This, and the Urmi manuscript, would already serve as an indication that the Mār Sāḇā of Tiyārī was the monk of Bēṯ Lašpar. The old Assyrian priests of this district who today live in Baghdad – Qāšā Thomas of Dēhē (originally from Ašītā), Qāšā Īsō’ of Rumtā and Qāšā Ḥušābā of Mabbūwā in Tiyārī – have confirmed that the Mār Sāḇā honoured in their churches was indeed the monk, ‘Rabban Mār Sāḇā’, and a ‘physician’ especially called upon to cure rheumatism. They were brought to this conclusion after having accompanied a group of people who, having heard of the miracles of this wonderworker, came to Bēṯ Lašpar to visit his relics.

It is worth pointing out, however, that the feast day of Mār Sāḇā of Tiyārī (a feast day which is no longer extant in the modern Nestorian calendar) does not correspond with any of the dates of the feasts of the Sāḇā’s mentioned above, but coincides with the Feast of the Cross. It lasted for three days during which time wine was plentifully consumed.

Whether this cult was imported from Bēṯ Lašpar or elsewhere, or whether or not it obscures the veneration of an unknown saint, knowledge of the

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57 16 August and 29 January for the martyr, 20 August for the monk.
sanctuary does not cast new light on our understanding of the ancient history of the region.

**Mār Zēy‘ā and Mār Tāḇôr**

Mār Zēy‘ā is well known, not least due to numerous details about his life passed down from legend.59 A. Scher does not give a summary of these details because, he explains, ‘there are many things in his *vita* that have been fabricated. I have thus avoided any mention of them’. Apart from his Palestinian origins, Zēy‘ā’s hagiography only provides, through a chain of miracles, the names of the towns where the sanctuaries preserved his memory. We have thus obtained an itinerary passing through ‘Aqrā (Šōš or ‘Fount of the Dragon’), the Sapnā valley (Bāmarnē, ‘Aqdēš and Kömānē), Arbōš, Bāz and finally Djīlū, where, on the slopes of Mt. Dūrāk, on boundaries of Djīlū and Gāḇār, the king Bālā, son of Zūrāq,60 who was already a Christian, helped him build a great temple in a village that would henceforth be called Māṯā d-Mār Zēy‘ā.

This church was also known as Dērā Marēzē, that is to say the church with 100 rows (of stone). It is so called because the legend relates that during the church’s construction, the site would sink into the ground during the night, until, with the prayers of the saint, its 100 rows of stone re-emerged so that the building could be finished. If we were to guess the height of the stone cut by the people of Bāz for the church’s construction in measures of feet, then the church would have stood at 100 ft – around 30 metres in height.

On his death in 431/432 at the age of 122 years, Zēy‘ā was buried in this church. He was placed in his tomb by his disciple, Tāḇôr, who had journeyed with him from Palestine and who had himself reached the age of 90 years and three months. The first Wednesday of January, the date of the saint’s death, would also become his feast day in the Syro-Oriental calendar.

The church of Mār Zēy‘ā in Djīlū was the object of frequent pilgrimage. *Ex votos* would be offered in the form of pieces of fabric and small bells threaded one after the other on cords hung around the nave. W.A. Wigram remarked that, in this church, there had never been a more interesting collection of items. These included pendulums and clocks, sacerdotal vestments of Russian manufacture spread out across the walls, ostrich eggs, coral from Malabar, porcelain bottles and, most interesting of all, ‘the handkerchief of the prophet,’ a piece of flax on which a *firman* (edict) of protection over the Christians was reputedly written by

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Muḥammad himself.  This relic, duly rapped in several layers of cloth, was venerated by Muslim visitors. However, this did not prevent the church from being pillaged ‘for the first time in its history’ in August 1915 during the First World War, after which time even the firman was lost.

An office of the feast of Mār Zēy’ā was composed by the priest, Aramyā d-Dergen, son of the priest Išḥāq. A poem by a certain priest Giwārgis on the same subject existed at one time in an Urmī manuscript. Although the two documents are now lost, it may still be possible to retrieve these copies from among the Assyrian refugees in Iraq and elsewhere.

One should not confuse this monk, Mār Zēy’ā, with the first bishop of Bā Nūhadrā in Ma’āltā, who, during a period of pestilence, proclaimed a new fast which became associated with the Fast of Nineveh. In the Nestorian calendar, Badger also identifies three days of fasting dedicated to Mār Zēy’ā.

A letter sent by the Nestorian patriarch, Eliyā VIII to Rome in 1610 – in which certain Chaldean names are distorted by papal translators – claims that the second most important among the ‘monasteries’ of the region of ‘Acchari’ was the sanctuary of ‘Mar Iasdit (?) the Great, who took the Cross of the Lord to the King of Persians and sent it to Great Rome, because he said that it was there that the head of Christendom resided’.

The editor of this text, P. Samuel Giamil, suggests in parenthesis that the name ‘Mar Iasdit’ could be read ‘Mar Zaiaa’. However, the Nestorian tradition does not appear to recall this event, and all my research on the cult of relics of the True Cross in relation to a Persian king and a Nestorian monk (reminiscent of the monophysite Āḥā) has led nowhere. The only similarity between our heroes of legend and the mysterious ‘Iasdit’ is their venerable age.

Let us then focus solely on the history of Mār Zēy’ā, and the church named after him built in the fourth or fifth century, or according to Grant, ‘more than two centuries before Islam’.

According to popular tradition, ‘three-hundred centuries after Christ’, there were Kurds, Yeẓīḍīs and Greeks present when Mār Zēy’ā converted the region. The presence of the former is not at all astonishing and is attested to in several sources. But what is meant here by Yeẓīḍīs? In the strictest sense, we cannot speak of Yeẓīḍīs before the 13th century, yet they are mentioned in several local

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62 Ibid., p. 370.
63 Amādiyā MS (unfortunately destroyed) dates from 1890.
64 Sarau and Shedd, Catalogue of Syriac manuscripts... of Oroomiah College, cod. 188.
65 Badger, Nestorians and their Rituals, vol. II, 188.
67 Asahel Grant, The Nestorians or, the Lost Tribes (London 1841), p. 224, n. citing the life of Mār ‘Eziah.
traditions. For example, they tell of how the Kidr Elias in Mataa Ketata (or Mataitya) in Baz was an ancient ‘Yezidi’ shrine. Perhaps the confusion arises from the word dasnaye which in the modern sense connotes ‘Yezidi,’ while in its ancient usage means ‘an inhabitant of Daseen’. These indigenous people were actually pagan and not Yezidis.

It is most difficult to determine the meaning behind the ‘Greeks.’ It is tempting to argue for Greek etymologies in certain place names, such as that of the village of Arwuntos in Baz. It is worth mentioning here that a portion of the inhabitants of Djilu were known as halanaye, and that the village of Garganaye in Beth Samsdin was known as Halane, which can be interpreted as ‘Hellenes.’ It is also said that another village of Baz, Tohvo, ‘became Muslim in the time of the Greeks’, which would mean the Greeks were there until 12th century! I leave this small mystery to the wisdom of the reader.

Mār ‘Abdišō, Mār Qardāq and Mār Ṭlayē

According to the previously mentioned letter of Elīya VIII, the most famous sanctuary of Hakkārī was that of ‘Abdišō’ the Anchorite. He and his disciple Qardāq gave their names to a much frequented church situated near the village of Beth ‘Aziza, in Tal, near Thūmā. The two saints are well known, although much greater significance is attached to Qardāq, ‘the prefect of Assyria’, who was martyred under Šapūr II in 367. The anchorite ‘Abdišō’, who converted him, initially lived in the mountain of Beth Bgaś, thus to the west of Thūmā. All mention of him ceases following the return of his disciple to the world, a decision which led to the latter’s martyrdom.

According to the tradition of Thūmā, master and disciple were buried side-by-side in the church of Tal. Rhétoré, who had seen their tombs, noted an engraving of a turbaned figure. Regrettably, the Dominican missionary omitted details of the rest of the costume.

Mār ‘Abdišō’ and Mār Qardāq also gave their names to a church situated in the village of Derē, near Amadiyya. Its history is of little concern to our study, except that, according to a local tradition related by Badger, it had been constructed precisely 366 years before the advent of the prophet Muhammad (256 C.E.), more than 100 years before the traditional date of Qardāq’s martyrdom.

68 Or indeed behind the ‘Franks’ whom we will encounter further on in Beth Margā.
69 Where we find the sanctuary of Tilā Māmē, of which little is known elsewhere.
71 Badger, Nestorians and their Rituals, vol. I, p. 252-3, although, as previously mentioned, Badger was inclined to believe that the Christian presence in the region dated no earlier than the 14th century, and thus would have likely approached such local traditions with scepticism.
As for the legend of ‘Ābdīšō’, in which we learn of the young Mār Ṭlāyē, it is found in a durēkā written by the deacon Ūshānā in the year 2174 of the Greeks (1862) of our era to be read on pilgrimage to the saint’s remains. This history is very vague and gives neither any indication of a name nor date.

Ṭlāyē (from talyā, child) was the five year old son of a great mountain king. He was murdered by his teacher who then hid the corpse. The day after a famous anchorite had prayed to God to reveal to the parents the fate of their son, during a mass held by the monk, the child appeared to his parents surrounded by light. He related to them how he had been killed, but urged them to pardon his assassin because of the place in heaven he now enjoyed thanks to him. He informed them of his corpse’s location, which was still venerated by the end of the 19th century. His parents withdrew to a grotto in the mountain where they lived out the rest of their days in solitude, the site of which was still known during Rhétoré’s time in the region.

In the church of Mār ‘Ābdīšō’ of Tāl, a miracle was said to take place each year: There, the fountain, which normally ran drop by drop, would flow abundantly on the feast day (September?) of the saints.

There was also a natural rock formation near the church with a hole through which a woman seeking fertility could slip. Being held there meant promise of a child, in which case they would have to make a vow to the saint before being released.

Mār ‘Ābdīšō’ was also invoked in order to cure insanity. The common practice of chaining sufferers by the neck was considered insufficient; instead they would be buried alive with official funeral rites, leaving them with only a small hole to breathe through. After 24 hours, the patient was said to emerge fully cured.

In a neighbouring grotto, one can see what resembles part of a huge animal protruding from the rocks, which pious locals believed to have been a thieving dragon turned to stone by the saint. Rābī Yoḥannā was inclined to believe that

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72 The deacon, ‘Ābdīšō’ Dāwīt, of Iyyāḏ (Berwārī Bālā), located the document for me. M. George Mālek Tšikkō kindly agreed to copy it for me, and Qāšō, curate of the church of Mār Zēy‘ā in Baghdad, provided me with the final section and the name of the author.
73 This king can be identified as Bālāq, who features in the legend of Mār Zēy‘ā, and is considered to be the ancestor of the family of Mālek Azīz of Tāl.
74 There is a commemoration of Mār ‘Ābdīšō’ of Urmī on 15 November of the Nestorian calendar of Malabar, while Mār Qardāq the martyr is celebrated on 7 Friday during the weeks of Qaiṣ (Calander of Kirkuk 1964: the first Friday of Elīyā).
75 It is not necessary to give a full account of these seasonal miracles, such as the appearance of dung beetles in the monastery of Mār Dānīel near Mosul, which were not associated with the feast day of a saint. In the region under study, an apparition of a green serpent was reported to appear only on the Day of the Assumption. In the Church of the Virgin in Lēwīn the serpent was white.
76 Wigram, The Cradle of Mankind, pp. 306-7, in which the author compares this passage to that of the church of S. Wilfred in Ripon.
it was in fact the remains of a fossilised dinosaur, similar to those seen at the time in Margā and discovered at the turn of the 20th century in Mt. Sahandē.

**Mār Addai, Mār Mārī and Mār Tōmīs**

There is no legend that maintains the Apostle of the East, Mār Addai, came to Hakkārī; however there is a grotto perched high in the mountains, inaccessible by foot, in which the apostle was reputed to have dwelled. This grotto is situated in the district of Wālţō, near the village of Mārt Maryam.

The name of the location Bēt Glālē, some 10 kilometres from Qūdšānēs, is explained by the purported miracle in this place. Mār Addai and Mār Mārī arrived there at a time when all the people of the town were gathered on the mountain to celebrate a pagan festival. Only the daughter of the king, who had fallen ill, stayed home. One can imagine the stupefaction of her parents upon seeing her miraculously running towards them, with the saints trailing behind; nothing more was required to convert the whole populace of that region.

According to the *Life of Mār Mārī*, the saint had a vision of the Lord instructing him to send his disciple, Tōmīs, to Dāsen. It was he who evangelised Dāsen and the zōzān and travelled as far as Armenia Minor and the land of the Medes. He was martyred in Gāḇār and his tomb was the scene of numerous miracles.

Curiously, the people of Gāḇār that I had occasion to question did not recall having heard of Mār Tōmīs among the saints of their place of origin, neither in Dizzā, their capital, nor elsewhere. However, the existence of this tomb indicates that their region was evangelised in the first Christian century. Perhaps the Armenians had preserved some vestige of this tradition, as the Christian population of the region were a mix of Armenians and Assyrians.

**Mār Qayyūmā**

In the Nestorian calendar, Mār Qayyūmā of Bāz is commemorated on the third Friday of summer. As far as I am aware, we do not possess the *Vita* of the saint. If he is to be identified as the same figure who founded the monastery of

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77 Of all my willing Assyrian informants, I am indebted the most to Ṭābī Yoḥannān, son of Qāsā Daniel of Bāz, to whom I owe much of the invaluable information utilised in this study. During a conversation concerning the rock formation, the old master used the word šeddā, the equivalent of our ‘werewolf’.

78 Peeters, B.H.O., no. 610; lost ms. from Koī Sandjaq cited in Scher, *Shuhadā’ almashriq*, vol. I, p. 19. I did not find any written sources on the coming of other apostles to this region; however S. Thomas had one church in Urmi, marking one of the steps on his route to India, and S. Bartholomew was supposed to have preached in Albāq. Cf. Grant, *The Nestorians or, the Lost Tribes*, p. 224.

79 According to Ṭābī Sarkās Sim‘ūn, the first bishop of Gāḇār who gave his name to the See, having been Mār Yoḥannān.

80 According to that printed in Malabar in 1964, as opposed to the calendar produced in the same year in Kirkuk, where there are many people who trace their origins to Bāz.
Dūrē, near Amādiyā, we may assume Qayyūmā was a monk. Badger states that his monastery was regarded by locals as the first Christian building built in Berwārı. This would probably place the saint around the fourth to fifth century. The monastery of Bēt Dūrē itself, however, is not of immediate concern to our subject.

In Bāz, Mār Qayyūmā’s shrine was located in the village of Śwā’üṭā, in the form of a small chamber built with enormous blocks of stone, one for each wall. According to oral tradition, Mār Qayyūmā evangelised Bāz, having lived 20 years before Mār Zēy’ā, and was a contemporary of Mār ‘Azīzā of Zērīn in Djlū.

**Mār ‘Azīzā**

We are already able to identify a saint by this name as the disciple of Aonnes of Sozomen, but he is not usually found among the disciples of Mār Āwgin. The legend of the Mār ‘Azīzā in question is found in the manuscripts of the library of the Presbyterian Mission in Urmī; we know that this particular collection has been lost and I have no knowledge of the existence of another copy of the text.

**Rabban Bōktizād**

The village of Kurḵē in Lizān, in Lower Tiyāri, was marked by the presence of a monastery of this name which was still inhabited by monks in the 10th century. The district in which this sanctuary was situated was one of those known in Kurdish as zōzān, meaning a fertile region where one finds green pastures. It was referred to as zōmā in Sūre, which is where the population and their cattle would retreat to in the summer. The zōzān in question is therefore situated near Ašītā.

We shall pass over the details of Bōktizād’s life other than the fact that he was a monk. His feast day is celebrated on the 15 November. In the same location, another saint, Azād, was commemorated on the 1 July, whose name

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81 Badger, *Nestorians and their Rituals*, vol. I, p. 382. While Badger does not give any approximation of the building’s antiquity, he would have once again been unlikely to accept as historically accurate any local account of its founding that predated the 14th century. Cf. n. 3 and 71 above.


83 Sarau and Shedd, *Catalogue of Syriac manuscript... of Oroomiah College*, cod. 128, 55 pages.


86 Grant, *The Nestorians or, the Lost Tribes*, p. 63.

87 For other references to this region see *ibid.*, pp. 78, 123 and 26.

88 The name is sometimes written Bōkyazd.
could otherwise have been an abbreviation of Böktizād. The name of Ezdu is also used, but mostly, it would appear, among the inhabitants of Thūmā.

**Marbīšū**

The village of Marbīšū, in the district of Dērrēnāyē (the diocese of Gābār), is still in Turkey, a few kilometres from the Armenian boarder, close to the Urmī heights. According to P. Bedjan, the name should be written without the final ‘āyn (as would be found in the spelling of ‘Īsō’). His name derives from that of the Nitrian Father, Bishoi, who flourished in the late fourth / early fifth centuries. His cult spread throughout the Syro-Orient and was honoured in a special way among the Nestorians, whose legends had him travel to Persia. He was supposed to have been buried in the village which carries his name. In a neighbouring grotto, a stalagmite formation which vaguely resembled a human figure was considered to be a statue of the saint, fashioned by the hands of angels.

Certain contemporary authors have had a tendency to confuse Bīšū with the writer Behīšō (or Bīḵīšō) of Kamūl. The latter was the author of a book on monasticism and was a contemporary of the patriarch Timothy the Great, who lived in the late eighth / early ninth century).

**Rabban Pētiōn**

Rabban Pētiōn of Dāsen in the Nestorian calendar is commemorated on the sixth Sunday after Epiphany. His title indicates that he was monk, but we do not know whether he dwelled in a particular monastery. He is to be identified as the great Rabban Pētiōn, the Martyr of Hulwān, whose cult was very wide spread (Baghdad, Diyarbakir, Mosul etc.). The local commemoration of this saint would not take place on the same time as his official feast day.

**ET ALIBI ALIORUM**

In order to construct a martyrology for Hakkārī – similar to that of Rabban Śalība for Ṭūr ‘Abdīn – we must rely on cartographical evidence; local legend; the notes of 19th century travellers; the names of sanctuaries unique to the region; and the hope that a yet undiscovered document will one day uncover information about the Acts of their saints.

Listed in no particular order:

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92 Ibid., p. 186.

• In Aden, between Ašīṯā and Mussakā, on the way to Amādiyā, there was a church dedicated to the ‘Forty-Five Martyrs’ as well as a grotto once inhabited by solitaries. The church still stands, neighbouring a mosque, although its door has been walled off.

• The church of Mār Aḥrāha, on the road from Çölemerik to Diz, known as the ‘Devil’s Bridge,’ before the Qalā‘a (palace) of Diz.

• The sanctuary of Rabban Dāḏio‘.

• In Humārō, Sūrinis, there are ruins of a stone-cut church that date back to the sixth century. Unfortunately, Rhétoré does not name the saint to whom it was dedicated.

• The church of Mār Aḇrāha, on the road from Çölemerik to Diz, known as the ‘Devil’s Bridge,’ before the Qalā‘a (palace) of Diz.

• The sanctuary of Mār Zakkā in the village of Mār Zēy‘ā in Dijlū. We need not elaborate on the details of his life here, except that, lacking water for the construction of his church, he mixed lime with the milk of a wild horse.

• A church was dedicated to Mār Brīḵā in the village of Māṯa d-Nahrā, who was reputed to have evangelised the area. Many people of the Dijlū tribe are named after him.

• In Tūmā, the church of Gunduktā is known as ‘Bethenia,’ that is to say the house of Hnanyā. We do not know whether this is a saint’s name or simply the name of one of the first Christians of this village who donated a house for use as a church.

• The region of Oramār had been evangelised by Mār Imāmā and his disciple Mār Dāniēl. The former was invoked against rabies and his shrine was venerated by Muslims as well as Christians. By the end of the 19th century, there were no more Christians left, except for one family who remained as caretakers of the church.

• The village of Bēṯ Margō, in Tiyārī, possessed the church of Mār Azdin. According to the notes of Mālek Tšikkō Gīyō, whose son was kindly willing to speak with me, the village was formerly inhabited by ‘Frankish’ Christians who had built a church. Over time, it fell into Muslim hands. When, following numerous adventures, the family of Mālek Tšikkō, who left Arbil in 1310, arrived in the region, the Kurdish amīr placed them in his service in order to protect his lands and established them in this village. Fifteen years after their arrival, they rebuilt the church. A branch of their family was based in Wālṭō, in Rēšā Tar‘a d-Nahrā, who brought from Nisibis the relics of Mār Āwgin and placed them in the church of Mār Azdin. They also venerated Mār Sarkīs (S. Sergius), who is considered the patron saint of Tiyārī and is commemorated on the first Friday of Lent.

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According to the texts, we find in Dāsen three monasteries of the disciples of Abraham – Rabban Abraham (possibly Mār Ābrāha of Dīz), Abba Īsōʾzkā, the founder of Bēṯ Rabban (probably located in the south due to its proximity with Bēṯ Āḇē, or perhaps Nahlā?) and John Adrama. Unfortunately, it is probably too late to compile a complete list of churches with names that could enable us to learn more of the region’s ancient Christian history; it has already been 50 years since the ‘Assyrians’ left their mountain home, and the older members of their communities are fast becoming fewer in number.

Towards a History

In the preceding sections of this paper, we have managed to trace well established dioceses in Hakkārī as far back as the fifth century. The sanctuaries and the legends of their saints firmly place the entry of Christianity in the Apostolic Age, having been further spread by a pleiad of monks in the fourth and fifth centuries. This seems to strongly indicate that a large proportion of the ‘Assyrian’ people already lived in the mountains since the beginning of our era.

Their legends even contain some echo of the pre-Christian period; in Lizān, people still showed visitors the cliff over which, before becoming Christians, their ancestors threw their old and infirm who no longer wished to burden their kin.96

Without a doubt, the thesis of Asahel Grant, who believed them to be the descendants of the 10 lost tribes of the Israel, seems quite improbable; but were such claims simply invented so that the family of the patriarch would believe themselves to be descended from the tribe of Naphtali,97 and that the Muslim neighbours of the Nestorians would not doubt the antiquity of their place in the region?98

In any case, whether of pure race or a melting pot of Diaspora Jews, persecuted Aramaeans, Christianised Kurds or even of mixed Armenian stock,99 the nāṣē d-ṭūrā (‘People of the Mountain’) present themselves with qualities for which they have long been famous, and which led the paşa of Mosul to remark in 1839: ‘Those mountain infidels (Christians) acknowledge neither pashas nor kings, but from time immemorial every man has been his own king!’100

In no less dramatic, albeit more favourable terms, Thomas of Margā wrote of the inhabitants of the village of Zārn in the eighth century:

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95 Ibid., vol. II, p. 67.
96 Grant, The Nestorians or, the Lost Tribes, pp. 58-9. Wigram, The Cradle of Mankind, pp. 308-9 also mentioned the custom, but reports that it occurred after the region’s evangelisation. According to Grant, the prevalence of this practice (which was paralleled in Sweden up until the 15th century) was due to the Nestorians of the region being ‘nominal Christians’.
97 Grant, The Nestorians or, the Lost Tribes, p. 81.
98 Ibid., p. 225.
100 Grant, The Nestorians or, the Lost Tribes, p. 46.
“There was in the country of Bêth Bêghâsh a famous village called Zârn, the inhabitants of which were warriors and they all were mighty men of valour. Not only did they pursue thieves, and make raids, but they also showed themselves fierce and disobedient to the royal officers who came to them for the imperial taxes, and many of them they fearlessly drove away with blows. From this village came... Shalmân... ...[who]... carried a sword and shed the blood, not of the good but of wicked men. And because the Khartêwâyê (the Kurds) had at that time begun [to commit acts] of destruction and theft, Shalmân armed himself, and having put an end to many of the Khartêwâyê by cutting off their heads. And the rumour is reported of him that every day in which he did not lie down upon the skull of some malefactor whom he had slain with his own hands as upon a pillow, his food was without taste and unpleasant to him.”

Of course, in their endless conflicts with the Hakkârî Kurds of the Sambô principality, the ‘People of the Mountains’ were not always successful in defending themselves; in the 10th century, 5000 people were massacred in Dâsen and the population temporarily dispersed. It is perhaps for this reason that we find them allied to the Mongols in the 13th to 14th centuries, fighting alongside them against the Kurds and the Arabs. These were the famous Qayatsîyê – mountaineers who would share in the ruin of Arbil, which they had possibly precipitated due to their impertinence.

Without delving too deeply into their recent history, let us turn to the first detailed document that we possess on them: a list of their tribes sent to Rome by Elîyâ VIII in 1610. After having spoken of his persecuted people, the Patriarch added with pride: ‘We have a number of families who are not subjects of the Muhammadan Turks, except in times of war, when they accompany the king in times of need’. And after having given a list of their geographical groupings,

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104 I have attempted to translate what I can from the heavily distorted list published by Giamil, Genuinæ relationes, pp. 113-4. Here we find the Geluite (people of Djilû), Sofonitæ (Berwârî Siwêne), Thionite (Tiyûrî?), Botonite (Bohtân), Toconite (Thûmû), Desnoite (Dêz, Dâsen?), Sotonite (Sût), Cocenite (Qûdûsnês), Cochite (Kûh), Talonite (Tûl), Raconite (Rûkân), Farsonite (?), Olotonite (Wûltû), Gatzorochite (Guzêreb in Bûz?), Barvadnite (Berwârî), Estofnite (Estûzûn), Causonite (Kûwsûb, Vûn?) and Belite (Belidnûrû, Badger, Nestorians and their Rituals, vol. I, p. 396).
with the number of families¹⁰⁵ in each and the name of their chief, the patriarch concludes: ‘They are men of war and musketeers. We have only counted each man by his family, without counting those who do not wish to go to war and who will become three times more numerous than those who do’.

Without denying the fact that their numbers were increased by the influx of refugees – not just in the time Tamerlane, but all throughout history –, we may consider the ‘People of Mountain’ as truly indigenous to Hakkārī, at least since the Christian era.

**Bibliography**


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---¹⁰⁵ The figures are absolutely unverifiable. I have attempted to compare them with those of Badger and Rhétoré, three centuries later, but such a comparison has proven impossible owing to the differences of the groupings.


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