

The 1924 Expulsion of the Assyrians of Urfa

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Abstract

This paper commemorates the centennial anniversary of the 1924 expulsion of the Assyrians from Urfa. The first section documents the expulsion based on three separate sources: (1) Oral family history, (2) a 1924 “Appeal by the Assyrians” addressed by the expelled Assyrians to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, and (3) diplomatic communications regarding that expulsion referenced in Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey’s Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894–1924*, used to corroborate the two initial sources. The second section places the expulsion in the historical context of the late Ottoman period. The third section describes the founding of the Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo. The fourth section examines the bleak prospects for the remaining Assyrians in their homeland amidst the ongoing Syrian Conflict, and finally, section five forms a prognosis for the survival of the Assyrian identity in the diaspora.

1. The Expulsion

In February 1924, less than two years after the formation of the modern nation-state of Turkey, the Urfalli Assyrians were expelled from their homes. The Urfalli Assyrians were

¹ The Author thanks Nicolas Aljeloo for many conversations about Urfa and Abdulmesih Bar Abraham for translating the “Appeal by the Assyrians” from Gharshouni Ottoman to English and Abboud Zeitone for providing the original document. Comments can be sent to: tomass@fas.harvard.edu

Christians of the North Mesopotamian city of Urfa (Assyrian/Syriac: Urhoy, or Urhāy;² Roman and Greek: Edessa; Arabic: al-Ruha; Turkish: Urfa; modern Turkish: Şanlıurfa). Prior to their expulsion, they resided in two quarters. The Old Quarter was located inside the city walls and was also referred to as the Arab Quarter because many of its residents spoke Arabic.³ The New Quarter, referred to as Qambariye (قمبرية) or Qanbariye (قنبرية), was just outside the city walls. Their two churches, St. Peter and Paul Cathedral in the old quarter and St. George's Church in the new quarter were 1.4 kilometers apart, roughly a 17-minute walk from one another.

Ismail Izzet Bey, the governor of Urfa, and Haji Mustafa Kamil Efendi, the head of the municipality of the People's Party, delivered an ultimatum to the community notables of the Armenians and Assyrians. The ultimatum specified that (1) the Armenians must leave Urfa within one week without any of their possessions, while (2) the Assyrians must leave within one month,⁴ provided they deliver their real estate to the state, and make a ransom payment of 1,100 Ottoman Gold coins in exchange for safe passage to what had become Syria under the French Mandate.⁵ This order was enforced by local gangs through an informal process of murders and death threats directed at the community's notables. A month prior, in January 1924, gunmen killed Boghos Shamma. He was shot in the mouth for speaking out against the pressure to expel his community from Urfa. The murderers subsequently delivered a death threat to his nephew Yaqoub Shamma (the author's maternal grandfather). "Leave Urfa and leave behind all of your family's possessions, or we would shoot you the way we shot your uncle."⁶

The atmosphere of fear prompted approximately 4,500 Assyrians, the equivalent of roughly 600 families, to abide by the expulsion order. The heads of households were forced to gather in the church's courtyard, relinquish their legal claims to their properties in writing, and give up their right to return to their homes in Urfa.⁷ They subsequently headed south in several caravans towards Aleppo. It was the closest major city under the French Mandate.⁸ Upon arriving in Aleppo, Basus Ya'qub and Qas Hanna, clergies of the Assyrian Protestant and Assyrian Orthodox churches, respectfully, wrote an appeal to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. The appeal detailed the events that had taken place in

² Amir Hakkak, 'The Ancient Name of Urfa', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 51 (1992): 209–14.

³ The English traveler J. S. Buckingham estimated the inhabitants of Urfa during his 1825 visit to be fifty thousand, among whom there were one thousand Assyrians, one thousand Armenians, and five hundred Jews; the rest all being Muslims. They all lived in separate quarters. He claimed that the Assyrians (to whom he referred to as Syrians) spoke Arabic. He also claimed that the entire inhabitants of Urfa had severe facial disfigurements due to prevalent disease. See J. S. Buckingham, *Travels in Mesopotamia*, London, 1827, pages 150-53.

⁴ This fact from family oral history is corroborated by a letter from J. F. R. Vaughan-Russell to Ramsy MacDonald, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 4 March 1924, United Kingdom National Archives, Foreign Office 371 / 10195.

⁵ An informal interview conducted by the author in 1978 with Archdeacon Abd al-Ghani Shamma, one of the author's distant uncles and the Archdeacon of Saint George's Church of the Assyrians Quarter.

⁶ Based on the author's oral family history. For sure, there must have been other threats made simultaneously to other members of the community, but this author has no record of them.

⁷ Based on a 1978 informal interview with Archdeacon Abd al-Ghani Shamma.

⁸ In 1979, the author informally interviewed Mr. Yaqoub Saghir, a first-generation Urfali born in Aleppo, who had just returned from a private fact-finding trip to Urfa. Mr. Saghir reported that the Assyrians' vacated dwellings were all occupied by Turks or Kurds and that the house of Yaqoub Shamma, the author's maternal grandfather, was being used then as a government branch office (Arabic: *Shubab*, Turkish: *Şuba*).

Urfa. A four-page copy of the original appeal published in the journal *Beth-Nahrin* is in Gharshouni (Ottoman-Turkish written with Syriac letters) and is attached below in Appendix A. Abdulmesih Bar Abraham translated the “Appeal by the Assyrians” into English for the first time in 2022.

An Appeal by the Assyrians⁹

Introduction to the “Appeal” by Beth-Nahrin

This appeal was submitted by Urfa’s Assyrian immigrants, who settled in Aleppo, to the Turkish government. It was discussed in the "*Doğru Yol*" newspaper published in Aleppo under the above headline [An Appeal by the Assyrians]. As our editorship received this for publication in *Beth-Nahrin*, it is reproduced here as is.

To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

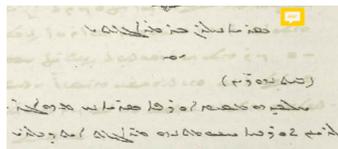
Your servants are requesting, that...

We present the sad state of the Assyrians who were exiled/ displaced from Urfa to the fore of your inclusive protection, which is all-encompassing, and we would be honored to ask for your great mercy regarding the calamity they have suffered unjustly.

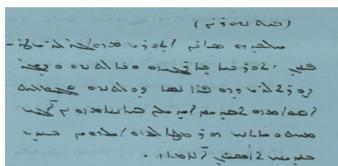
It is impossible to deny that the Assyrian communities have been for six hundred years under the administration of the Ottoman State, and since its recent changes, under the jurisdiction of the Turkish Republic without being linked with any other government. They have stood out for their loyalty and good intentions, never hurting the feelings of the Turkish citizens or the administration in any way or politically.

The community in question, as it has long been done by the nature of its devotion, has suffered many difficulties and hardships that have not been experienced and seen even during World War I. It has fulfilled all kinds of sacrifices in terms of life and property to the government to which it is attached. Instead of being rewarded in return for their service of allegiance, the highest limit of disaster was retaliated against them and they were punished by being unjustly displaced and killed along with other Christians elements.

⁹ *Beth-Nahrin (Mesopotamia)*, The Assyrian Paper, Yıl: 8, No. 13-14, 1-15 Temmuz 1924. Published every two weeks by Naoum E. Palak, USA, s. 5-9. In reference to the Arabic word “Suryan”, the “Appeal” uses the term Suryaniyin and Athuriyin interchangeably. The author is aware of sensitivities among few of the Assyrians regarding the Assyrian appellation but decided to accurately reflect the wording of the “Appeal”. See the two clips from the “Appeal”: Page 5, headline, Süryanilerden bir muracaat (Arabic: Muraja'a min Suryaniyin).



Page 8 - line 2, 3rd word (Athuri): Haleb'da sakın Athuri muhacirlar (Arabic: Muhajrin Athuriyun saknin bi Halab...)



We were hoping and expecting to live a peaceful life by benefiting from the general peace agreement. Though the policy of extermination applied to the detriment of the Christians in Turkey during World War I, deporting the survivors of the Christians naked (without anything) after the armistice is continuing. Assyrians are declared for execution by Sheikh Safvet Efendi, who came to Urfa from Ankara five months ago and became a member of parliament for Urfa. From the Turks he formed a party in Urfa called the "People's Party" and provoked the public with damaging orders and fear. Upon his return, the need for Assyrians in Urfa to leave the country was (openly) revealed by the governor of Urfa [Ismail] İzzet Bey, along with the head of the municipality and the People's Party, Hacı Mustafa Kamil Efendi.

It was decided that this warning, which was not heeded at first, would be put into practice through intimidation/fear and terror. An elderly person from our community named Abdelahad Mardo was accused, according to which he had gone abroad and returned after contacting the enemy (there). He was deported after paying over about six thousand Lira worth of movable goods while his immovable property was confiscated.

An Armenian pharmacist named Qarekin was openly killed on the street in broad daylight and his property was confiscated. And it was rumored that this was meant to be a threat, according to which this movement would target our community. Established gangs entered the houses of the wealthy of our community at night, armed, and captured a lot of money, threatening people with death.

As these examples show, the community in question, who was tortured day by day and despaired of living under siege in their homes, had to seek a solution from the aforementioned governor to get rid of their problems. The following terms were offered to them as a mean of resort through the aforementioned chief.

First (1)

Official documents, issued to prove that the country was left voluntarily while avoiding return, were to be signed by each head of the family; the country had to be left as quickly as possible. The situation was to be telegraphed to Ankara's government.

Second (2)

Avoiding open or confidential communication and contacting a party in this matter.

Third (3)

In exchange for the protection of lives, property and honor to beyond the borders of the country, 1,100 coins of Osmanli Gold (even if much requested, this amount was also fixed) are to be paid by the entire community.

Forth (4)

This "agreement is sealed, documented, and affirmed with an oath (and thus made irreversibly)

The conditions mentioned, which were put under duress and pressure, were accepted by Urfa's Assyrians in a situation of fear for life, and the amount demanded by the community was collected according to everyone's solvency and given to the above-mentioned head Hacı Mustafa Efendi.

Although the state inspector in Urfa, who became aware of the fact that this forced payment, which was paid as the price to escape, could not be kept secret, the majority of the community emigrated already when he started his investigation. The investigation of such an important subject by a few people who lack freedom of expression and personal authority naturally leads to the fact that the endeavors are unsuccessful.

The Assyrians, who were suddenly forced to leave, sold their movable property without value, while the government confiscated their immovable properties. Some tyrants, such as the chief of the Badilli tribe, Said Beg, and Şükri Ağa, the son-in-law of Bedri Ağa, a member of parliament from the Othagaça tribe, also took and confiscated the buildings they liked without cost, just based on formalities and false promissory bills.

Some beneficiaries received little or nothing in return for the value and worth of some homes (which were forcibly sold) or where ownership rights were relinquished. Hence, the options of the people were very limited. Even debts they had to surrounding villages could no longer be collected. Therefore, they could not pay their own debts and, in addition, new debts were imposed on them by the authorities under obscure names, which they had to pay compulsorily. Since they gave a lot of money to the gangs, they left Urfa only with money enough to cover road expense to reach Aleppo.

Despite the fact that the rights of the minorities are guaranteed by the [Lausanne] Peace Agreement and the loyalty we have shown for six hundred years, the Assyrians do not even think or dream of returning to Urfa due to all the unfair and hostile behaviors that has been retaliated against us.

But first (1)

Compensation for personal movable property which they had to abandon and/or exchange free of charge, as well as for religious structures and charitable institutions, such as churches, places of worship, monasteries and schools, and places belonging to Diocese and foundations.

Secondly (2)

Compensation for all the losses and damages they have suffered due to oppression and expulsion from their spiritual community and their former homeland.

Third party (3)

We hope that Your Excellency, will accept the special respect of a helpless people, with the strong expectation of your kindness and help in this sad matter for the people inside and outside Urfa.

*On behalf of the Assyrian Protestant Community of Urfa
Acting spiritual leader
Basus Ya'qub*

*Urfa Assyrian Orthodox Community
Spiritual Leader
Qas Hanna*

Comments by Beth-Nahrin

Anyone who examines the bitter content of the written statement submitted by the Assyrian immigrants in Aleppo to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with copies sent to the French Government and League of Nations, cannot help but feel sorry.

Despite being loyal to the lowest individual of Turkey's sultans for hundreds of years, the persecutions of the poor Assyrians by the Turkish government, which has recently evolved/changed from a sultanate to a republic, from despotism to parliamentary monarchy, are so painful and tragic that they make forget the persecutions of Timur, Cengiz, and Hulagu.

From time to time we have magnified these sufferings and disasters by writing in the columns of this journal that Turks have never rewarded Assyrians according to their loyalty; some of our recollection seem to touch their pride, even though we promised to meet the expectations of our readers.

More recently, during the days of mobilization, while we were raising our voice against the persecution through this magazine, as the Turks shed the blood of thousands of our Assyrian compatriots for no reason, His Excellency Alacaci-zade Jirjis Pasha, one of the notables of our Urfa people, who lives nearby in Istanbul, rebuked us. He sent us a letter that was reproachful and not right to be written even by a common man. His letter was filled with nonsense and fabrications such as, the "Assyrians have never and will not find any sanctuary and safe refuge other than the merciful embrace of the Turks."

Where was His Excellency Jirjis Pasha when the pitiful Assyrians of Urfa were expelled from their "merciful embrace" and kicked out?

Why didn't he act as a mediator for this nation and confront the Turks with the aforementioned phrase, that he derived from history? And why he didn't save his Assyrian compatriots from the scourge of exile?

2. The Historical Context

What Assyrians refer to as Sayfo of 1915 was only one part of the mass murders of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. This campaign extended from pre-World War I under Sultan Abdulhamid II to the wartime dominance of the Committee of Union and Progress and, ultimately, through the immediate postwar rise of the Mustafa Kemal Atatürk-led Turkish Nationalists.

Muslim Turks, including the political leaders and everyday citizens, came to see Asia Minor's Christian communities as a danger to their state's survival. They were determined to eliminate this danger by eradicating the presence of Christians. Non-Muslims were considered traitors, guilty of collaborating with outside powers to dismember the Ottoman Caliphate. While successive regimes under changing political, military, and demographic circumstances dealt with Christian communities differently, the result was the same. In 1894, the Turks launched the first of three campaigns employing various tools of persistent oppression. These tools included mass murder, attrition, expulsion, and forced conversion to Islam. By 1924, the Turks had cleansed Asia Minor of four million Christians.

A single protest in Istanbul on September 30, 1894, initiated the trend of mass murders. Groups of Armenians, estimated between 500 and 2000, assembled at Kumqapı, near the Armenian Patriarchate, and marched toward the grand vizier's offices to voice their "grievances." The Social Democrat Hunchakian Party partly organized the event.¹⁰ Philip Currie, the British Ambassador to Istanbul, declared the demonstrators "were armed with

¹⁰ Terrell to Olney, 1 October 1895, United States National Archives, College Park, Maryland, and Washington DC Records of Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Turkey (Constantinople), Vol. 20; Cambon to Foreign Office, 30 September 1895, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), La Courneuve, Paris, Turquie: Nouvelle Serie (NS); Terrell to Olney, 24 October 1895, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part II. Turkey (Documents 479–746). U.S. Department of State. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1896.
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1895p2/comp16>, 1325–1327; Houghton Library, Harvard University, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions 16.10.1, Vol. 5; See also Ottoman police reports about preparations before the demonstration, 26 September 1895, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Istanbul, Turkey, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Askeri Maruzât, 106/67.

pistols and knives of a uniform pattern,” implying that organizers had distributed the weapons.¹¹ The demonstrators, described in one report as “mostly young men of the middle class,” carried a petition railing against “the present state of affairs in our country.” The petition protested “systematic persecution” aimed at “causing the Armenians to disappear from their own country, ... innumerable political arrests, ... barbarous and inhuman tortures, ... and the iniquitous exactions of the officials and tax-gatherers.” The Armenians demanded reform in the eastern provinces and a curb on Kurdish brigandage, citing “the massacre in Sassoun.”¹²

The Armenians of Urfa were subjected to two massacres following the Istanbul September 30th demonstration. One took place in October 1895, and the other, far larger, in December of the same year.¹³ Urfa was home to approximately 20,000 Armenians before the massacres. Between 8,000-10,000 were killed over the course of the two massacres. 2,500–3,000 of them were burned alive at the cathedral. Forty Assyrians and one Greek Catholic were also killed.¹⁴ Between October and December, hundreds of Christians were converted to Islam.¹⁵ In the weeks following the December massacre, another 600 were converted. Most reverted to Christianity over time. In September 1896, Vice Consul Henry Gerald Fitzmaurice (1865-1939), a British consular official and Turkish speaker, wrote that two hundred Muslim converts remained in the town.¹⁶

The most widespread massacres against Assyrians took place in 1915. Still, according to the archives of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Aleppo (see the table below and the original document in Appendix B), the share of Urfa in the 1915 massacres was relatively minuscule compared to other regions, where the number of dead was only about 340 individuals, comprising 40 families. The main reason for the low number of murders seems to be Urfa’s mutessarif Haydar Bey’s resistance to execute orders from the Interior Ministry in Istanbul. Because Urfa’s Christians only made up 10-15% of Urfa at that time, half of whom were Armenians, they were not perceived as posing a threat to the state. Moreover, there were hundreds of English, French, and foreign nationals residing with Christian families. Nonetheless, when eventually, about 6000 troops of the Ottoman army arrived to

¹¹ British Ambassador to Istanbul Philip Currie to Lord Salisbury [Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 1895-1902], 1 October 1895, *Turkey No. 2 (1896)*, Correspondence Relative to the Armenian Question and Reports from Her Majesty’s Consular Officers in Asiatic Turkey (HMSO 1896), 30–35.

¹² British Ambassador to Istanbul Philip Currie to Lord Salisbury [Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 1895-1902], 1 October 1895, UK Blue Books, *Turkey No. 2 (1896)*, 22; “Enclosure 2 in No. 50. Petition,” 30 September 1895, *Turkey No. 2 (1896)*, 32–35.

¹³ Vice Consul Henry Gerald Fitzmaurice (1865-1939), a British consular official and Turkish speaker who visited Urfa in mid-March 1896, is the primary source for most of what is known about the violence in Urfa.

¹⁴ Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey’s Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894–1924*. Cambridge, Massachusetts (Harvard University Press, 2019): 106-107.

¹⁵ “Report of G. H. Fitzmaurice to Sir Philip Currie, Constantinople— Ourfa”, March 16, 1896,” Houghton Library, Harvard University, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions 16.10.1, Vol. 12. See also, Barnham to Currie, 6 January 1896, United Kingdom National Archives, London, Foreign Office: Embassy and Consulates, Turkey, General Correspondence 195 / 1932.

¹⁶ Fitzmaurice (Urfa) to Currie, 10 September 1896, United Kingdom National Archives, Foreign Office: Embassy and Consulates, Turkey, General Correspondence 195 / 1930.

Urfa in October 2015, they bombarded the Armenian Quarter killing thousands of them and deporting the survivors to Raqqa.¹⁷

“A List of the Losses of Our People [Jacobite Assyrians] in Mesopotamia During War World I”						
Province, City, and Village	Village	Family	Dead	Church and Monastery	Priest and Cleric	Metropolitan and Patriarchal Vicar
Diyarbakir Region (Assyrian: Amida)						
City of Diyarbakir and Its Suburbs	30	764	5379	5	7	
Slivan		174	1195	5	1	
Lige (Lice)	10	658	4706	5	4	Monk Samaan, Bishopric Vicar
Derkeh (Derik)		50	350	1	1	
Siverek	30	897	5735	12	13	Metropolitan Dnha
Wayran Shahr (Viranşehir)	16	303	1928	1		
Mardin	8	880	5815	13	5	
Savur	7	880	6164	2	3	
Nusaybin	50	1000	7000	12	25	Father Estefan, Patriarchal Vicar
Jazira (Cizre)	26	994	7510	12	8	
Bishayriyah (Bişeri (Batman))	20	718	4481	10	10	Father Gabriel, Archimandrite
Baravat (Bismil)	15	282	1880	1	1	
Midyat	47	2935	25820	60	60	Father Afram Metropolitan Yaqub (Monastery of the Cross)
Bitlis Region						
Bitlis	12	130	850	1		
Siirt		110	650	1	2	Father Ibrahim

¹⁷ Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894–1924*. Cambridge, Massachusetts (Harvard University Press, 2019): 207-09.

Sherwan (Şirvan)	9	283	1870	2	4	
Garzan	22	744	5140	12	9	
Sanjaq Kharpout (Harput)						
Kharpout (Harput)	24	508	3500	5	2	
Sanjaq Urfa						
Urfa (Shanlıurfa)		50	340			
Total	326	12,360	90,313	160	155	

The detailed breakdown of the table above coincides with Metropolitan Afram Barsom's figure of the total number of the Assyrians killed in 1915 to include 90,000 Jacobite Assyrians and 90,000 Nestorian and Chaldean Assyrians. He indicated this in his February 1920 letter addressed to the British Prime Minister Lloyd George. The letter was accompanied by a memorandum addressed to the Paris Peace Conference. See the letter and memorandum in Appendix C.

By May 1917, 6,000 or so Armenian deportees were resettled in Urfa and working "in perfect harmony with the ferocious characters that only one year before had fanatically destroyed 14,000 Christians."¹⁸

In early 1922, there were approximately 5,000 Christians in Urfa.¹⁹ Within two years that number had dropped to 4,500. In January and February of 1924, Urfa's remaining Assyrians and Armenians were subjected to a fresh campaign of persecution. The mutessarif reportedly told them that "all Christians must eventually leave Turkey."²⁰ There was molestation and robbery. A handful of prominent Assyrians were murdered or arrested. Initially, those being forced out were prohibited from taking anything with them and forbidden to "sell their lands." They were left with only "two days rations and one blanket."²¹ In February or March 1924, five Armenians were killed in Urfa. During the subsequent deportations, Armenians were allowed to take only "the clothes they stand in."²²

The Turks relaxed their orders and allowed the Assyrians to take some property, including money after it became apparent they were leaving. Land and real estate owners were required to sign statements expressing that they were not being forced out. "An Arab

¹⁸ Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894–1924*. Cambridge, Massachusetts (Harvard University Press, 2019): 209.

¹⁹ Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894–1924*. Cambridge, Massachusetts (Harvard University Press, 2019): 367.

²⁰ Paul Buhrman, US consul, Aleppo, to Secretary of State, 13 February 1924, and Paul Buhrman to Secretary of State, 11 March 1924, both in United States National Archives, Record Group 59, 867.4016, Roll 48.

²¹ Ibid.

²² J. F. R. Vaughan- Russell to MacDonald, 4 March 1924, United Kingdom National Archives, Foreign Office 371 / 10195.

named Ajami Pasha, a friend of [Mustafa] Kemal's, who had previously been awarded deported Armenians' houses and lands" was locally leading the campaign.²³

General İsmet Pasha, one of Mustafa Kemal's aides, delivered propaganda and misinformation on March 9th, 1924. He wrote that the reports of attacks on Christians and the desecration of their churches were unfounded, but that the "forced deportation of 4,000 Christians from Urfa to Aleppo has already begun."²⁴ Days later the Americans reported that 1,250 Urfa Assyrians and 750 of its Armenians had reached Aleppo.²⁵

There are 15,000–20,000 Assyrians living in present-day Turkey, most in Istanbul, with roughly 2,000 in eastern Anatolia.²⁶ They are the remainder of a community of more than half a million who had inhabited the Ottoman Empire before World War I. Almost all of them were slaughtered or expelled between 1914 and 1924. Some 250,000 were killed by Muslims between 1914 and 1919. Most died in massacres, but some fell in battle.²⁷

Since 1920, many publications documented the massacres committed against the Assyrians of North Mesopotamia in the late Ottoman period from 1894 to 1924. Below is a list with five of the most important documented publications:

1. David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I*. Gorgias Press, 2006.
2. Eye Witness, *al-Quasara fi Nakabat al-Nasara* [in Arabic], [1895, 1914-1919].
3. Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894–1924*. Cambridge, Massachusetts (Harvard University Press, 2019), Pages 373-380.
4. Abed Mshiho Neman of Qarabash, *Sayfo: An Account of the Assyrian Genocide* [1918], Translated by Michael Abdalla, Łukasz Kiczko, Edinburgh University Press, 2021.
5. Hannibal Travis, *Genocide in the Middle East: The Ottoman Empire, Iraq, and Sudan*. Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2010. Chapter VII, Pages 237-279.

3. The Arrival in Aleppo

The Urfalli Assyrians rented space in several khans and spread throughout four different quarters (Qastal Mushtt, Qastal Haramy, Bab al-Nasr, and al-Jedaidah) upon entering the gate of Aleppo. It is reasonable to assume that they depleted their savings within a short period and decided to find a permanent solution for their living situation. Within a year, the efforts of Metropolitan Afram Barsom and the French Mandate Authority led to a

²³ Ibid. Quoted in Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894–1924*. Cambridge, Massachusetts (Harvard University Press, 2019): 371.

²⁴ Internal report, 9 March 1924, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archives), Foreign Ministry, General Intelligence Section, Political Documents, IM, 239 34. See also 11 March 1924, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archives), Foreign Ministry, General Intelligence Section, Political Documents, IM, 239 37).

²⁵ Paul Buhrman, US consul, Aleppo, to Secretary of State, 13 February 1924, and Paul Buhrman to Secretary of State, 11 March 1924, both in United States National Archives, Record Group 59, 867.4016, Roll 48.

²⁶ Thomsen, "The Assyrians / Syriacs of Turkey," 3. See also Karimova and Deverell, "Minorities in Turkey," 12.

²⁷ Toynbee, Arnold. *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey: A Study in the Contact of Civilizations*, 2nd ed. London: Constable, 1923. Reprint, New York: Howard Fertig, 1970., 281–282.

plot of land being purchased from the Italian real estate investor Marco Poli on the slopes of a hill two miles to the north of Aleppo's external walls. This land was then divided into small parcels on which the Assyrians camped for years before building houses on them as their financial conditions improved. This new settlement was initially referred to as “the Assyrian Camp” in Arabic: “*Mukhaim as-Suryan*”, then, “*Barrakat as-Suryan*”. After it was built with Aleppo’s golden or white limestones, it was officially named the “Assyrian Quarter”, Arabic: “*Hay as-Suryan*.”

Christians of various sects comprised one-third of Aleppo’s inhabitants at the time of their arrival, the rest were Sunni Muslims.²⁸ As urban expansion reached and engulfed the Assyrian Quarter, it was gradually surrounded by Sunni Muslims and by a Kurdish settlement on the hilltop of the northern side of the Old Assyrian Quarter. Most still live in the original location of the Assyrian Quarter and few in the New Assyrian Quarter that was built just to the north of the original one.

In the 1950s, a handful of Assyrian youth attempted to participate in the Syrian nationalist movement that identified the Fertile Crescent as a common homeland for its inhabitants. Another handful joined the Baath and various factions of the Communist Parties. Although, the vast majority kept their distance from the political parties of the Arabic-speaking world.

Presently, the Assyrians are self-contained within the boundaries of the associations of their Saint Geroge church. In the past forty years, they have developed a siege mentality and surrounded their church with supporting infrastructure that can only be accessed from a fortress-like courtyard within a gated complex.

Today, the Urfalli Assyrians can best be described as a religious community. Since their adoption of Christianity in antiquity, they attached a perception of holiness to their Syriac dialect of Urfa, based on their city’s central role in the making of Syrian and Mesopotamian liturgy. This explains why their entire cultural production up to this time is almost exclusively liturgical. By perceiving their language as holy, their clergy discouraged secular vocal music compositions. The subsequent loss of their spoken Assyrian language, sometime toward the end of the Crusades’ period, resulted in their worldly form of musical entertainment being produced in the common vernacular of Arabic and then in Turkish. Yet, their contemporary compositions remain heavily influenced by liturgy. This influence is on display in the orchestral and chamber music compositions of Nuri Iskandar. For decades he conducted the St. George Choir of the Assyrian Quarter and in his magnum opus, he transcribed Urfa’s liturgy into musical notes (*Bet Gazzo*). Although, Nuri Iskandar was not the first to attempt composing secular music.

The Yalda Band had attempted to compose popular music that transformed the Church’s liturgical style into worldly songs. In an informal conversation three decades later, the band’s lead singer, Nadim Atmaja commented, “I was singing the songs in such manner

²⁸ In 1941, J. Sauvaget estimated the Christian inhabitants of Aleppo at 130,000 compared to 320,000 Muslims. Based on this estimate, the ratio of Christians to Muslims in 1924 must have been at least one-third. See J. Sauvaget, ‘Halab’. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. (Brill, 2010). Brill Online. Harvard University. Accessed 20 June 2010. http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-2641

that when one listens to them, he would recognize it as distinctly Assyrian style”.²⁹ Even a listener who does not understand the Assyrian lyrics would be under the impression of listening to liturgy when hearing the dark chants in songs of the band. Such a phenomenon is not unique to the Urfalli Assyrians. The late Munir Bashir, the most prominent contemporary oud player in the Near East, was a church deacon in Mosul in his youth. He also alluded to the Assyrian (Syriac) liturgical influence in his improvisations of Taqāsīm and to some of the Near Eastern Maqāmāt in the preface to his double album entitled *Mesopotamia*.³⁰

4. The Syrian War and the Second Exodus

One hundred years after the expulsion of the Assyrians from Urfa and their displacement to Aleppo, nearly 30% of them remain in their homes in the Assyrian Quarter. They have not fled the war that has been raging in Syria. It started in 2011 after the initial Arab Spring demonstrations, calling for the fall of the regime, turned into a regional war by proxy. As a result of the war, most of the Assyrians were uprooted from a second station in their greater Syrian and Mesopotamian homeland. Those remaining are still suffering from an economic siege with the rest of the Syrians left residing in government-controlled areas. The siege aims to impoverish and starve them for the purpose of stirring civil unrest and igniting another revolt.

However, unlike in the late Ottoman era, the Assyrians, and Christians at large, are not the prime target of the war. Rather, they indirectly suffer with the rest of the Syrians that await the outcome of an intra-Muslim sectarian war complicated by regional geopolitical ambitions and American-Israeli efforts to remake the Fertile Crescent in a manner that enhances the security and dominance of the national-religious state of Israel over the centers of power in the Middle East.³¹

The Arab, Turkish, and Western governments' support of the armed Syrian rebellion, followed the government's suppression of the anti-government demonstrations. Their support was justified by the intention to overthrow a dictatorial regime with plans to replace it with a democratic one. That declared objective was made when societies in the Arab world had hitherto not produced a single constitutional and democratic system in any of the Arabic-speaking countries lying between the Atlantic Ocean and the Persian Gulf. The implication being that an armed rebellion was sufficient to produce by itself a democratic system based on constitutionally granted individual freedoms.

Regional and American coordination, Arab funding, armed Syrian army defectors, and tens of thousands of recruits from the Sunni Muslim countryside joined the rebellion in a concerted effort to topple the Syrian regime. The Organization of the Muslim Brothers

²⁹ Informal conversation with the author.

³⁰ Munir Bashir, *Mesopotamia (Le Chant du Monde)*; and Saad Bashir, 2003).

³¹ Mark Tomass, *The Religious Roots of the Syrian Conflict: The Remaking of the Fertile Crescent*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

(aka. Brotherhood) served as a political umbrella for the rebels, albeit under different appellations. The ethos of the Muslim Brothers appealed to the West, and most importantly to the Obama Administration in the United States. The Brotherhood stood as a moderate Islamic political force that if brought to power in the Arab World would gradually adopt democratic political mechanisms while maintaining the prevailing Islamic value system of the Middle East. The Obama Administration was persuaded by the possibility that Middle Eastern states could be modeled after contemporary Turkey. There, its ruling Justice and Development Party and the president had adopted the ethos of the Brotherhood and were perceived to have been able to spur economic progress while getting along with the West as a member of NATO.

Much to the disappointment of the West, members of the armed rebel groups branded as the “Free Syrian Army” soon joined the better-funded and organized Salafi-jihadi offspring of the Muslim Brothers, such as al-Qaida’s al-Nusra Front and ISIS. Those two organizations also had a clear vision of the rebellion’s mission and were not encumbered by the false pretension imposed upon them of fighting for “freedom and democracy.” More embarrassing to the West were the public spectacles, such as ISIS members broadcasting the beheadings of two Americans. The al-Nusra Front and ISIS believed that they had become an independent striking force by means that made it impossible for Western media to continue marketing them as democratic forces yearning for freedom and democracy. Their self-styled mission was to restore the “Islamic Caliphate by the Method of the Prophecy,” and as a result, the Neocon-dominated American foreign policy team decided to change gears and implement the project to reshape the Fertile Crescent by relying instead on local Kurdish forces that they had up to that point classified as terrorists.

Thus, overnight, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) morphed into “The Syrian Democratic Forces.” American public relations specialists added the new name in Arabic, Assyrian, and in the Kurdish language on a new flag in a PR attempt to demonstrate the party's new democratic ethos and distance it from the Kurdish nationalist ideology for which it was previously known. This immediate switching of gears alarmed the Neo-Ottomans in Turkey. They feared that the PKK rank and file who moved from Turkey into Syria and re-branded as People’s Protection Units (Kurdish: YPG) may strive to establish a mini-Kurdish state in the northeast of Syria with American and Israeli backing and threaten its security. Acting on their fears, Turkey invaded Syrian territories by using Syrian rebel groups, who had recently discovered their Turkish origin, as cannon fodder.

Foreign intervention divided Syria into three separate alliances that ruled over separate geographical spheres of influence: (1) Syrian, Iranian, and Russian, (2) Turkish, Turkish-Controlled Rebels, and al-Qaeda, and (3) Kurdish, American, and Israeli. Therefore, the political representation of the Assyrians is also divided into three parties, each of which appeases the dominant military force of the territory in which they reside. This demonstrates the extent of their weakness and dependence on the dominant force to save what remains of

them from death and abuse and to avoid the massacres that befell the Assyrians only a century earlier.

The Christians of Syria, in general, and the Assyrians, in particular, have no stake in an armed conflict with the Syrian state. They yearn to return to the way things were before the outbreak of the war, but with minor and gradual reforms that would grant them more individual and cultural freedoms. They would not be able to obtain such rights under the shadow of any of the competing parties currently fighting against government forces. However, often, wars create security problems that force good people to negotiate with unsavory characters. Yohanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yazigi, two Metropolitans of Aleppo, along with Yohanna's driver, Mr. Fathallah Kaboud were among the victims of one of these interactions.

On April 22, 2013, Ibrahim responded to a call from Yazigi to help him return to Aleppo, after Yazigi went to negotiate, unsuccessfully, with a group of rebels. The goal was to secure the release two priests Maher Mahfouz and Michael Kayyal. Ibrahim was perceived to have cultivated a line of communication with the rebels granting him safe passage. On their way back, however, the two Metropolitans were kidnapped, and Mr. Kaboud was killed. Since their kidnapping, only rumors have circulated about their fate. The most gruesome of which is that "two priests or monks" who are assumed to be the Metropolitans were beheaded by the gang of the Chechen jihadist Maghumed Zakirovich Abd al-Rahmanov, nicknamed "Abu Manat", shortly after their abduction.³²

For decades, Metropolitan Yohanna had aired his concerns over the fate of the Assyrians in their original homeland. In the early nineties he told the author that "a plan is being hatched to eradicate the Assyrians from the North Mesopotamian region and to settle the Kurds in their homes."³³ However, during the revolt of the Syrian Sunna, he wanted to calm the anxious people around him after the outbreak of the war. Among Assyrian gatherings he said, "there is no fear for us here."³⁴ Only a few days before his kidnapping he told the BBC, "Christians are not targeted, as is the case in Iraq. Everyone - the government and the opposition - assured him, during his meetings with them, of their respect and love for Christians, and urged him to encourage Christians to stay in Syria and not to emigrate from it."³⁵ He added that "the test of citizenship is at a time of distress, and the solution is not to leave the country." In a different BBC interview, he said that "what is happening is

³² <https://nordicmonitor.com/2019/01/turkish-intelligence-mit-worked-with-a-cut-throat-jihadist-in-syria/>

³³ Metropolitan Yohanna Ibrahim was a friend of the author since the former appointment as Metropolitan of Aleppo and later visited author during his residence in the United States as well as Czechia. By virtue of this friendship, the Metropolitan engaged in numerous informal conversations with the author regarding the fate of the Assyrians. In the mid-1990s, the Metropolitan visited a military training camp of the PKK in Syria and met with its leader Abdullah Öcalan and besieged him to ask his followers in Turkey to stop attacking Assyrian villages.

³⁴ Based on an informal address to the congregation in the Assyrian Quarter in August 2011 at the occasion of the commemoration of author's father 40-day requiem.

³⁵ https://www.bbc.com/arabic/multimedia/2013/04/130423_syria_kidnap_2304

that they [Christians] are exposed to indiscriminate attacks” and that “the survival of Christians in Syria is not linked to the survival of President Bashar al-Assad's regime.”³⁶

Metropolitan Yohanna tried suggesting that Christians, including the Assyrians, were on the sidelines of the multi-sectarian, multinational war over Syria and Mesopotamia. He hoped the armed sectarian opposition would not kill, rob, and displace them while on their way to full control of the land. His Eminence expressed on several occasions, two decades before the Syrian war, that the Assyrians were massacred during the late Ottoman period “because they did not understand the political game.”³⁷ Presumably, his Eminence had in mind that the Ottoman Turks regarded the Christians in the same manner as the Armenians. A fifth column, allegedly beholden either to the “Christian” West or to “Christian” Russia, and therefore untrustworthy. This was exacerbated after the Armenians of the Ottoman Caliphate demanded equal rights. It is not certain how his Eminence thought he could play it right in the contemporary episode of religious conflict, but his actions after the outbreak of hostilities demonstrate that he wanted to cultivate a relationship with opposition leaders lest they assume power.

Similar sentiments about local Christians having loyalty to foreign powers were made public by the local mayor of the town of Tell ‘Ada in the northwest of Aleppo. It was there that the Metropolitan had purchased the land on which the ruins of a monastery existed. Jacob (or James) of Edessa (640-708) spent his last decade at that monastery. That mayor confiscated the land, with the justification that “the Crusaders are returning.”³⁸ The Metropolitan’s subsequent appeal to the Syrian president in a personal visit to the Presidential Palace reversed that decision.³⁹ The Metropolitan attempted to calm the potentially hostile locals in a 2008 speech given at the ruins of the monastery. He stressed that the monastery belongs to “all of us as Syrians”.⁴⁰ On various occasions the Metropolitan met local notables and iterated the notion that “we are native to this land and not related to the Crusaders.”⁴¹

³⁶ https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2013/04/130413_syria_interview_bishop_john_ibrahim

³⁷ Based on a personal conversation with the author in Vienna in June 1995.

³⁸ Based on Metropolitan Yohanna’s private conversation with the author during a visit to the monastery of Tell ‘Ada briefly after it was purchased.

³⁹ Based on the author’s conversation with Metropolitan Yohanna, the Syrian president responded to the Metropolitan’s complaint about the monastery’s confiscation by the local mayor, by saying “who is that ignorant who said that [i.e. you of being Crusaders]?”

⁴⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adEVhg1VauQ> Accessed September 15, 2022.

⁴¹ An unpublished manuscript by Metropolitan Yohanna.



Photo taken hours before the kidnapping of the two Metropolitans. From the right: Fouad Ellia (an Assyrian member of the opposition), Metropolitan Boulos Yazigi, the Attorney Abdel Rahman 'Allaf (Head of the opposition Free Supreme Judicial Council), Metropolitan Youhanna Ibrahim, the son of Abdel Rahman 'Allaf

By the time the Metropolitan was kidnaped, the armed opposition had been joining the ranks of the better funded and more disciplined al-Qaeda with its direct sectarian mission to "support (Arabic: *Nusra*) the Sunnis" as evident by its sub-name "al-Nusra Front". The group did not use vague and foreign western terms such as "freedom and democracy". The armed opposition groups under the umbrella of "the Free Syrian Army" were no longer in control of the checkpoints. This was clear when the kidnapers, immuring the two Metropolitans, were able to pass these points without facing any opposition. It is likely that the rebels stationed at the checkpoints were the source of information on the Metropolitan's whereabouts. That theory works if the two oppositionists in the above photo were not responsible. The Monastery, along with an area nearly three times larger than Lebanon, is currently under al-Qaeda's control.

Nearly a decade later, the Organization of al-Qaeda: al-Nusra Front went through two name changes and eventually disassociated itself from al-Qaeda in 2018. They originally changed to the Conquest of the Levant Front (Arabic: *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham*) before settling on the Liberation of the Levant Authority (Arabic: *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham*, HTS). Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the leader of the group, made this declaration on July 19, 2022 regarding al-Qaeda's objective:

Its' project is no longer a project of revolution against injustice and tyranny. It has turned into building a "Sunni entity", because Sunnis are exposed to an existential threat in Syria, despite their majority and large number, as the Asad regime is working to change the Sunni identity to another identity, by naturalizing a large number of Iranians, Lebanese and others. HTS has a strategic plan with clear parameters, represented in the liberation of all of Syria, but it is about steps and some preparation, and it needs a window of opportunity, indicating

that the general conditions in the areas outside the control of the Syrian regime or the international, local, and regional push towards that there is a great opportunity that will come for military liberation.⁴²

The next day on July 20, al-Julani visited three deserted Christian villages in the Idlib province and met with old men and women who could not flee the region.⁴³ This move was meant to prove his readiness to become a statesman and not simply the leader of a terrorist gang. He portrayed an ideal of respecting everyone's right to life, including infidels.

Al-Qaeda's rebranding had begun a year earlier when prominent PBS journalist Martin Smith of Frontline visited al-Julani at his headquarters in Idlib on February 14, 2021. The public was presented with an amicable side of a jihadist. An empathetic view of a man classified as a terrorist by the United Nations Security Council.⁴⁴



*American journalist Martin Smith with al-Julani, Feb 14, 2021.
Note the PR stunt of similar shirts and suit colors.*

The rebranding of al-Qaeda demonstrates that the Syrian conflict is not approaching an end. Regional and international powers, despite different aims, see the opportunity to continue the destabilizing project they embarked on 11 years ago. As a result, the Assyrians' desire to stay in their homeland has been inadvertently rendered unrealistic because of the ongoing project.

The interests of the involved parties are conflicting. Israel wants to break the region into smaller religious and sectarian states. At a minimum, Israel wants to establish an allied Kurdish state in the east of the Euphrates that is hostile to Turkey and Iran. The success of

⁴² <https://tinyurl.com/4p9z37hx> My translation.

⁴³ <https://tinyurl.com/4jka2pwu>

⁴⁴ <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/abu-mohammad-al-jolani-interview-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-syria-al-qaeda/> ; https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/individual/abu-mohammed-al-jawlani

this endeavor depends on the extent of the Israeli leverage over the political and military decisions in the United States.

Contemporary Turkey, while spreading jihadist ideology, wants to capture as much land as possible from northern Syria after Russian military intervention dashed Turkey's dream of reviving the Ottoman Caliphate beginning with the Levant.⁴⁵

Iran aims to preserve Syria as it was prior to the rebellion, dependent on Syria not joining the wave of normalization with Israel. However, Iran is willing to cede sections of the north to Turkey to block the establishment of a Kurdish state that would threaten the security of both countries.

Finally, Russia is working to re-establish the Syrian state's control over its internationally recognized borders. Its aim is to maintain a regime that will ensure the continued presence of its two military bases along the Syrian coast and to prevent a Neo-Ottoman expansion into Syria and elsewhere northwards that would threaten its national security.

The war exposed the fragility of the so-called "Syrian people", the Syrian state, and the fantasy of Arab nationalism, not to mention the even more unrealistic fantasy of Syrian nationalism. When the inhabitants of the "Syrian Arab Republic" were liberated from the state's security grip, they raised the Turkish, Kurdish, Druze, Sunni (represented by the Free Army), al-Qaeda, and ISIS flags. The security network along the border areas collapsed after only few weeks of popular uprisings. This collapse allowed hordes of jihadists to enter from neighboring countries that sponsored them.

5. Prospects for the Assyrian Identity

In summation, the prospects for the Assyrians' continuity in their Syrian and Mesopotamian homeland is grim. Their numbers are small enough that they will not be politically influential, even if Iraq and Syria miraculously turn into a pluralistic and democratic political system. The most that Assyrians can hope to obtain is security and citizenship rights that protect them from the deliberate humiliation policies that were practiced against them in Syria and Mesopotamia. Anything short of a secular regime prioritizing freedom for all religious identities will inevitably revert to the practice of public humiliation against non-Muslims because "the infidel is not worthy of honor, but rather must be insulted".⁴⁶ Insulting an infidel is a religious duty imposed by religious law.

⁴⁵ <https://nordicmonitor.com/2019/07/public-school-textbook-in-turkey-justifies-9-11-slams-nato-brands-eu-as-christian-club/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.islamweb.net/ar/fatwa/114621/> Such common religious judgments are derived from the Quran's verse 9:29 to: "Fight those who do not believe God nor the Last Day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by God and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth [Islam], from among the People of the Book [Bible], until they pay the Jizyah on the back of their hand and feel themselves humiliated [subdued]."

The question of the Assyrian's continuity in their homeland is that of their religion, not of their ethnicity, and this unites them with the other religious sects that do not belong to the predominantly Sunni sect. Their religious scholars determine what constitutes believers, infidels, and apostates, as well as how believers must deal with them based on the prevailing religious heritage. Short of adopting non-fundamentalist Sufi Islamic principles that leave matters of reward and punishment to "God's judgment in the afterlife" and not in the hands of man, Muslims will remain bounded by perceiving Islam as a set of divine laws (*Sharia*) that need to be abided by.

Non-Muslims are currently governed by the Covenant of Umar. This maintains their inferior social status. The Covenant does not allow the construction of new churches, among other things. Those who recently inaugurated the mini-church of Hagia Sofia neglected this charge and became the target of a missile strike from the rebel-controlled region.⁴⁷

As for the case of diaspora, it is unlikely that migrants will ever return to Syria or Mesopotamia after more than a decade of settling in foreign lands. The prospect of homecoming would likely remain unchanged even if physical security is restored and the American-imposed economic blockade ends. The Assyrians will continue assimilating into their host countries. Most have become citizens, just as tens of thousands did a century before them. It is unknown how many members of future generations will maintain the Assyrian identity. The outlook is made grimmer with the Jacobites' appellation in Arabic being "Suryan." This translates into foreign languages as "Syrian". While Syrian is a correct and accurate translation derived directly from "Assyrian" it is no longer representative of the people. The Syrian identity has become synonymous with an Arab-Islamic identity. This is contradictory to the Assyrian identity, which is historically and culturally different from the Arab identity. This clash of meanings and lack of representation leads to some Assyrians adopting the Aramean identity and referring to their ethnicity as "Syriac", the Urfa dialect of the language of the Assyrians. However, from a linguistic and historical point of view, an Aramean identity collides with the Assyrian origin of the word Syrian.⁴⁸

The persistence of the Assyrian identity in the diaspora is linked to how their religious and cultural institutions are managed today. A unified Mesopotamian Christian social and self-identity would not develop without the consolidation of their social infrastructure since identity-sharing groups and resource-sharing groups create one another.⁴⁹ Their infrastructure would combine, eradicating distinctions between "ours" and "theirs". Common allusions to both classic and contemporary symbols, together with their names, would appear. The ecclesiastical orders in charge of their communities would permit

⁴⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/592828>

⁴⁸ Richard N. Frye, "Assyria and Syria: Synonyms," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 51 (1992): 281-285.; Robert Rollinger, "The Terms "Assyria" And "Syria" Again," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 65 (2006): 283-7.

⁴⁹ Mark Tomass, "Multiple Resource-Sharing Groups as Bases for Identity Conflict" in *The Assyrian Heritage: Threads of Continuity and Influence*, Eds. Önvér Cetrez, Sargon Donabed, Aryo Makko. Uppsala, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2012. Pp. 243-277.

full integration in their canon law, allow the election of a single person as the head of the church worldwide, and reinstate their independence from the Church of Rome. These actions would begin the process of undoing centuries of Christian sectarian identification. To obstruct the persistence of sectarianism, Masses would need to be celebrated by the clergy on a rotational basis. All the churches would have to vote for a single board of trustees and emerging secular organizations would need to recruit members from all sects to create an integration model that the clergy would be pressured to follow.

Assyrians would be forced to cope with their numerous identities as Suryan (Syriac), Assyrian, Chaldean, or Aramaeans if they continued to live by the adage that "our Church is not nationalistic; our nationalism is the Church."⁵⁰ Their distinct ecclesiastical organizations would continue, as they have in the past, to mark and guard the frontiers of the communities over which they rule, producing competing symbols that would be translated into various names and identities. Assyrians can choose what appeals most to their opinion-makers given the wealth of information available from their millennia of history. Historical relevance arises from the necessity for a group to define its place in modern society through a chosen use of its own past, rather than from the recollection of the event itself.⁵¹

Recently, the ancient clergy's disagreements over Christology became antiquated and no longer taken seriously. They were forced to discover fresh justifications for upholding long-standing demarcations. They made an appeal for a pre-Arab Aramaean identity, rather than an Assyrian one. Today's Assyrians did not start the promotion of the Aramaean identity after rigorous historical examination, but because the Church of the East had officially embraced the title Assyrian. The Aramaean term was meant to serve as a cultural stand-in.⁵² By using the label Aramaean, the "Jacobites" could continue to distinguish themselves from the "Nestorians" while avoiding the separatist connotations that the term Assyrian has come to connote in the circles of the Iraqi and Syrian police states.

The components of Aramaean, Syrian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Akkadian, and Babylonian have all contributed to the Assyrian people's heritage. Based on historical evidence, their exclusivity to any of these identities can neither be proven nor disproven. They may develop bridges to integrate their resource-sharing networks to generate a shared identity, or they can opt to proceed toward fossilizing their fragmentation inside their existing sectarian and regional identities. If they continue down the former path, both their existence in their native country and in the diaspora would suffer. They would (1) be progressively driven out of Iraq and Syria due to their limited numbers, a reality following the U.S. invasion and the Syrian

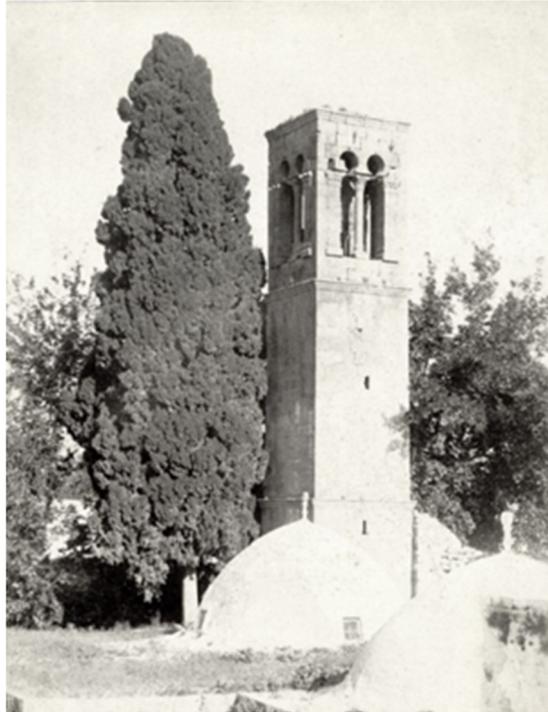
⁵⁰ Conversation with Metropolitan Afram Aboudi, Aleppo, 26 December 1977.

⁵¹ Noriko Sato, "Selective Amnesia: Memory and History of the *Urfalli* Syrian Orthodox Christians", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 12 (2005): 331.

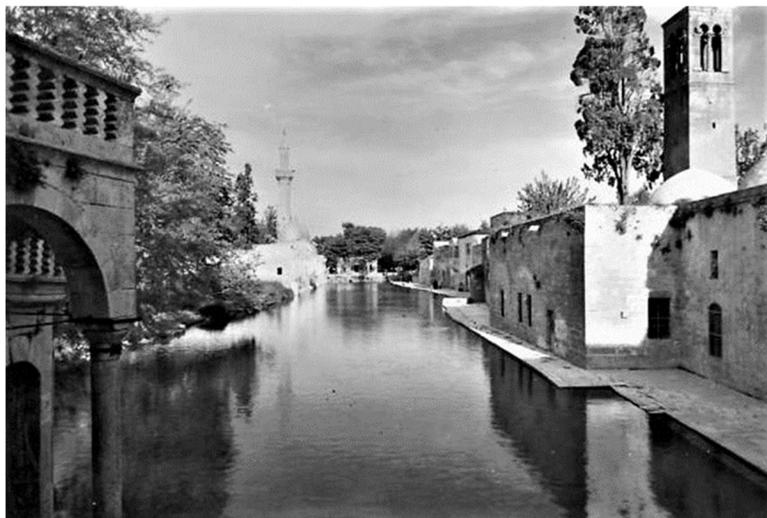
⁵² In June 1995, the author had a private conversation with Mor Gregorios Saliba Shamoun, the Metropolitan of Mosul about the Church of the East's formal adoption of the Assyrian identity, during which the Metropolitan asserted: "We may be more Assyrians than they are". "We" being the Jacobites and "they" being the Nestorians.

conflict, respectfully. They would then (2) blend into their foreign host identities and vanish into obscurity.

6. Images of Urfa before, during, and after the expulsion



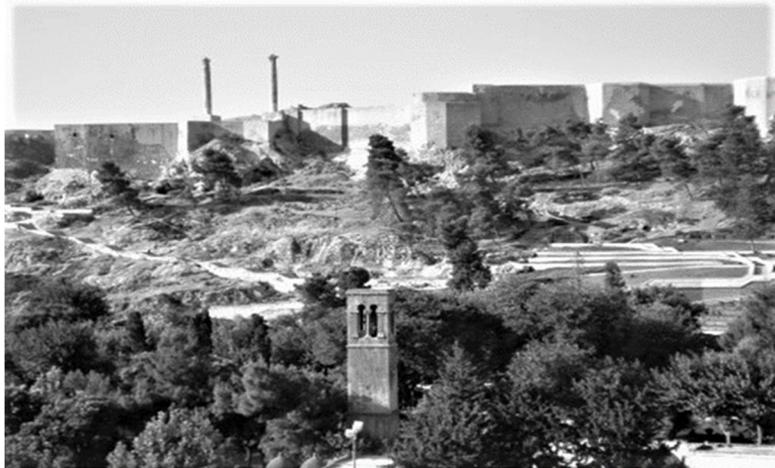
Urfa, 1896: The steeple is called the 40 Martyrs tower. It belonged to the Church of the 40 Martyrs. It is now the minaret of the Nabi Ibrahim Halil al-Rahman Mosque, which replaced the Mother of God church built by the emperor Zeno in the fifth century on the "school of the Persians," which was closed and destroyed due to it being a center for "Nestorian" teaching.



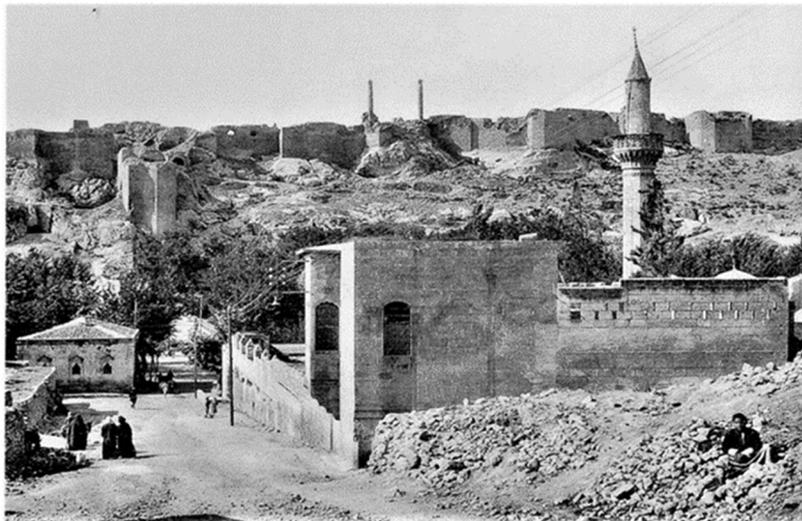
Urfa, 1896: Abraham's Pond and the former cathedral on the right



Urfa, 1900: Abraham's Pond and the former cathedral on the left



Urfa, 1923: The castle



Urfa, 1924



Urfa, 1926: A monastery and the burial site of the poet and composer of Syriac liturgy Saint Ephrem the Syrian in the orchards to the west of Urfa's city wall. The monastery is referred to below the photo by Ottoman Turkish as Khidr Elias. The Armenians too it over and converted it to St. Sarkis Monastery after they became more numerous than the Assyrians in the late Crusader period. Currently, it is the Yakup Kalfa Public Primary School.

Appendix A: Appeal by the Assyrians

Handwritten text in two columns, likely a historical document or appeal. The text is written in a cursive script, possibly Syriac or a related language. The right column contains a date: "Handwritten text: 14 - 15". The text is dense and covers most of the page area.

Appendix B:

“List of Losses Mesopotamia from Our People During World War I”

لائحة خسائر أبناء شعبنا
في بلاد ما بين النهرين خلال الحرب العالمية الاولى

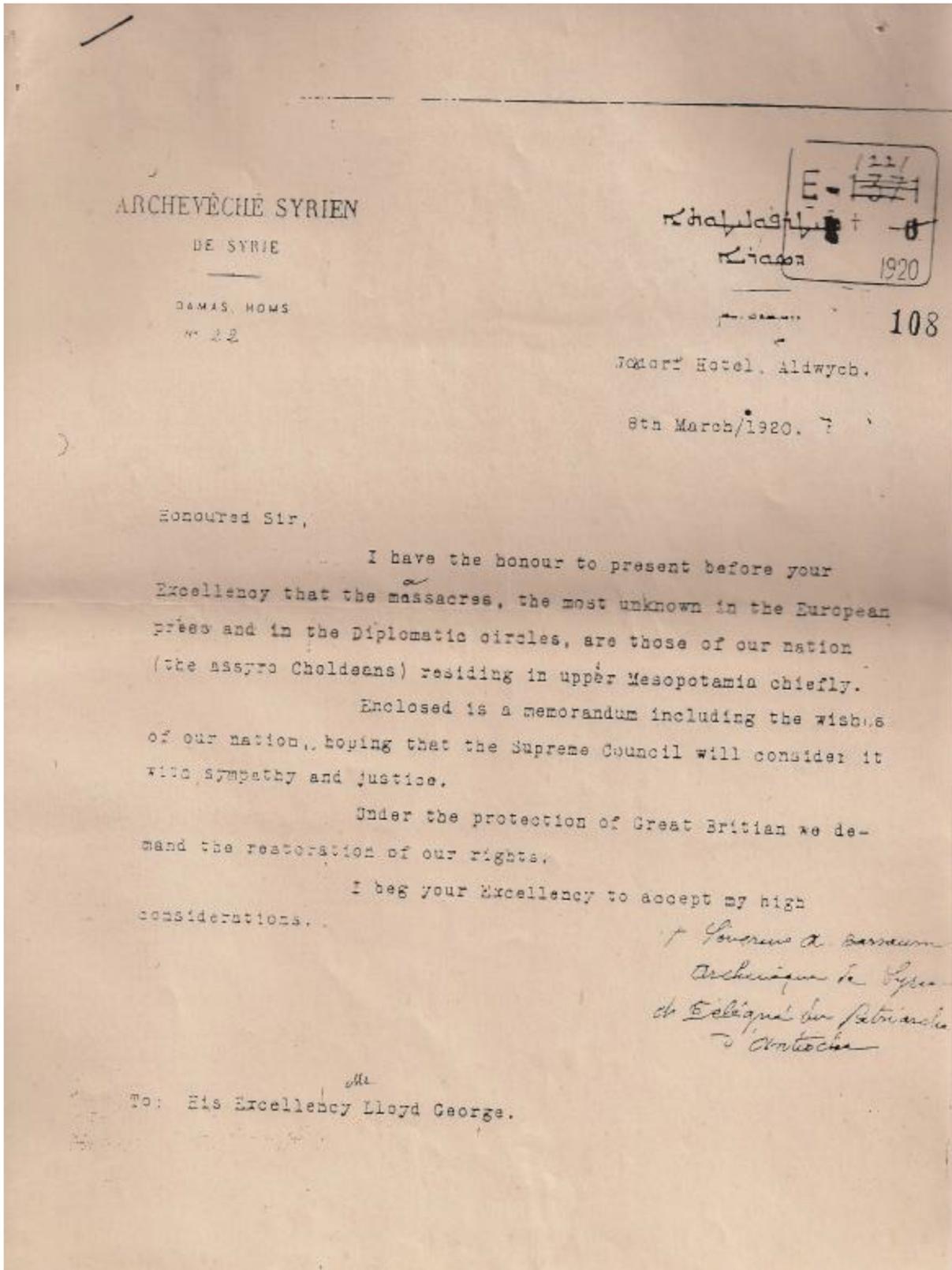
ولاية ومدينة وقرية	قرية	عائلة	عدد القتلى	كنيسة ودير	كاهن ورجل دين	مطران ونائب بطريركي
ولاية ديار بكر						
ديار بكر وضواحيها	٢٠	٧٦٤	٨٢٧٩	٤	٧	
سليمان		١٧٤	١١٩٤	٤	١	
ليجة	١٠	٦٤٨	٤٧٠٦	٤	٤	الراهب سعفان نائب اسقف
ديركه		٤٠	٢٤٠	١	١	
سيفرك	٢٠	٨٩٧	٤٧٢٤	١٢	١٢	المطران دنحا (سيفرك)
ويران شهر	١٦	٢٠٢	١٩٢٨	١		
ماردين	٨	٨٤٠	٤٨١٤	١٢	٤	
معاور	٧	٨٤٠	٦١٦٤	٢	٢	
تسبين	٤٠	١٠٠٠	٧٠٠٠	١٢	٢٤	الاب اسطيغان نائب بطريركي
جزيرة	٢٦	٩٩٤	٧٤١٠	١٢	٨	
بشيرة	٢٠	٧١٨	٤٤٨١	١٠	١٠	الاب حبرانيل ارشمندريت
باراقات	١٤	٢٨٢	١٨٨٠	١	١	
مديات	٤٧	٢٩٢٤	٢٤٨٢٠	٦٠	٦٠	الاب امرام والمطران يعقوب (دير الصليب)
ولاية بتليس						
بتليس	١٢	١٣٠	٨٤٠	١		
سمرت		١١٠	٦٤٠	١	٢	الاب ابراهيم
شبروان	٩	٢٨٢	١٨٧٠	٢	٤	
شار زان	٢٢	٧٤٤	٤١٤٠	١٢	٩	
سنجق خربوت						
خربوت	٢٤	٤٠٨	٢٤٠٠	٤	٢	
سنجق اورفة						
اورفة		٤٠	٢٤٠			
المجموع	٢٤٤	١٣٢٤٠	٩٠٢١٢	١٥٦	١٥٤	٧

ملاحظة : يوجد خطأ في جمع القرى والعائلات والكنائس والاديرة والكنيسة ويجب أن يكون كما يلي :
(٣٣٦ قرية) . (١٣٣٦٠ عائلة) . (١٦٠ كنيسة ودير) . (١٥٤ مطران وراهب وكاهن متزوج) .

[90,313 total deaths, comprising 326 villages, 13,360 families, 160 monasteries, and 155 clergy]

Source: Syrian Orthodox Church Archives, Aleppo, Syria

Appendix C: Letter and Memorandum to Lloyd George



ARCHEVÊCHE SYRIEN
 DE SYRIE
 DAMAS, HOMS
 n° 22

كحلجلاجل
 كلاس 1920

108

Hotel, Aldwych.

8th March/1920.

Honoured Sir,

I have the honour to present before your Excellency that the massacres, the most unknown in the European press and in the Diplomatic circles, are those of our nation (the Assyro Chaldeans) residing in upper Mesopotamia chiefly.

Enclosed is a memorandum including the wishes of our nation, hoping that the Supreme Council will consider it with sympathy and justice.

Under the protection of Great Britian we demand the restoration of our rights.

I beg your Excellency to accept my high considerations.

*Georges A. Basmam
 Archevêque de Syrie
 et Eschiquet du Patriarche
 d'Antiochia*

To: His Excellency Lloyd George.

ARCHEVÊCHÉ SYRIEN

DE SYRIE

DAMAS, HOMS

№ 23

110
Khalafiyeh
Kiam

February/1920.

MEMORANDUM.

=====

We have the honour of bringing before the PEACE CONFERENCE in information that H.B. the Syrian Patriarche of Antioch has intrusted me with the task of laying before the conference the sufferings and the wishes of our ancient assyrian nation who reside mostly in the upper valleys of Tigris and Suphrates in Mesopotamia our chief points are the following:

1. It is to be noted that our nation apart from the persecutions inflicted upon it in the by-gone days of the Red-Sultan Abdul-hamid in 1895, has proportionately to its number suffered more than any other nation whose fate was the cruel sword of the Turks and the dagger of their brothers in barbarism the Kurds, as it will be seen by the enclosed list, which indicates the number of our massacred people amounts to 90,000, Syrians and 90,000 Nestorians and Chaldeans..
2. We regret bitterly that this ancient and glorious race which has rendered so many valuable services to civilization should be so neglected and even ignored by the European press and diplomatic correspondence, in which all Turkish massacres are called "Armenians massacres" while the right name should have been "The Christian Massacres" since all Christians have suffered in the same degree.
3. We beseech the Peace Conference in it's dealing with Criminal Turkey not to forget to extend it's solicitude to the innocent Syro-Chaldeans whom no one can indite the plea of revolutionary movements, consequently we ask for the emancipation of the viloyets of Diarbekir, Bitlis, Kharpout, and Ourfa from the Turkish Yoke.

111

ARCHEVÊCHÉ SYRIEN

DE SYRIE

DAMAS, ROMS

N°

Καθολικὸς ἱερός

Καθολικὸς

1

8

- 2 -

- 4. We protest against the projected establishment of a Kurdish authority, a so-called delegation is endeavouring to promote it's influence and renew the horrible scenes of the recent Kurdish barbarism.
- 5. We ask for indemnities in compensation of our damages.
- 6. We ask for the assurance of our National and Religious future.

We count on the justice of the Peace Conference to listen to our Nation which sighs for a tolerable future in which she can play her ancient role of Assyrio-Chaldean civilization.

*† Severus El. Barsanouni
Catholique de Syrie
Délégué au Patriarcat de*

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