

Nov./Dec. 2022

ASSYRIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

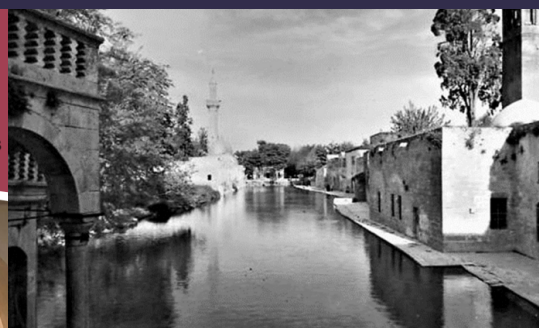
Vol. 1 Issue 3

Quarterly Newsletter



Donate To Support Our Endowment

Established in 2022, and designed to be self-sustaining, the Endowment Fund ensures long-term, stable financing to support the Assyrian Studies Association and programs in the years ahead.



MEET OUR 2022 GRANT WINNER, ESTHER ELIA

The Assyrian Studies Association interviewed Esther Elia in October 2022 to discuss her work and how becoming the Assyrian Studies Association's Assyrian Academic Research Grant recipient has impacted her project.

Read more on pp. 12-13

ENDOWMENT CAMPAIGN 2022

Established in 2022, and designed to be self-sustaining, the Assyrian Studies Association's Endowment Fund ensures long-term, stable financing to support ASA and programs.

Read more on pp. 2-3

THE 1924 EXPULSION OF ASSYRIANS IN URFA

In an article written by ASA Advisory Board Member, Dr. Mark Tomass, he discusses the forceful displacement of Assyrians from Urfa, Turkey and how that has impacted the Assyrian population in the region.

Read more on pp. 14-16

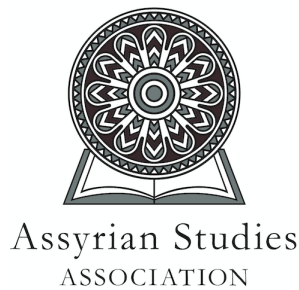
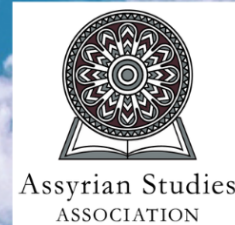


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This newsletter is created and published by the Assyrian Studies Association, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization that promotes interest in and the academic study of the *longue durée* of the Assyro-Mesopotamian heritage through supporting research, scholarly publications, and collaborative projects. It facilitates contact and exchange of information between scholars, academic organizations, and communities across various disciplines. ASA functions as an instrument to advance studies on the Assyrian people and their culture on an academic level.

Women's Rituals in the Ancient Assyrian Household



Saturday, January 14, 2023, - 2-4:30 pm (PST)
Chapman University - Argyros Forum Room
209AB

In collaboration with the Assyrian Student Association of Los Angeles (ASA of LA), we are excited to announce an in-person event with Dr. Julye Bidmead, Associate Professor at the Department of Religious Studies at Chapman University. The topic of discussion will focus on Dr. Bidmead's research on outlining the adult life cycle of an everyday Neo-Assyrian woman and the importance of giving birth in ancient Assyria. Since death during childbirth was so frequent, ancient Mesopotamians developed an extensive collection of cuneiform texts containing remedies, incantations, prayers, amulets, and figurines to protect both mother and child.

After the presentation, a conversation will follow between Dr. Bidmead, Alexandra Lazar, Executive Director at ASA, and Juliana Khamo, President at ASA of LA. *Reception to follow with light refreshments.*



Dr. Julye Bidmead,
ASA Advisory Board
Member & Associate
Professor,
Department of
Religious Studies at
Chapman University



Alexandra Lazar,
Executive
Director of
Assyrian Studies
Association



Juliana Khamo,
President of
Assyrian Student
Association of
Los Angeles

RSVP by January 10, 2023, at:

www.AssyrianStudiesAssociation.org/educational

Donate To Support Our Endowment



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ASSOCIATION

Established in 2022, and designed to be self-sustaining, the Endowment Fund ensures long-term, stable financing to support the Assyrian Studies Association and future programs in the years ahead.

We need your help to sustain our future:

- The Endowment Fund enables us to turn each dollar into many dollars.
- All donations to the Endowment Fund are restricted only for programmatic support.
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- Write a check to the Assyrian Studies Association, indicating “Endowment Fund” in the memo.

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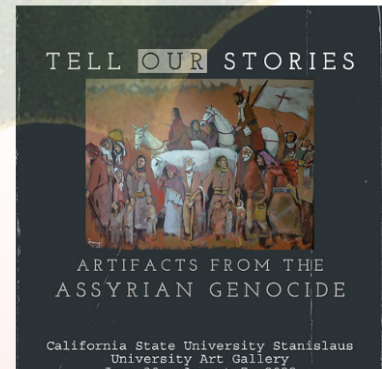
How Your Donation Supports Our Programs:



Provide more grants to graduate students, like Esther Elia, our 2022 Assyrian Academic Research Grant recipient.



Create more educational events that support Assyrian heritage and culture, like our NYC event held at The Met with Assyrian artist Nenous Thabet.

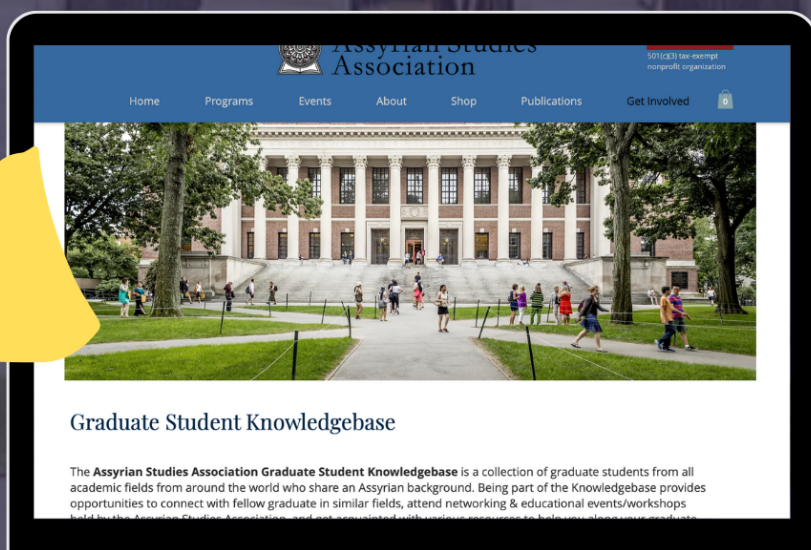


Coordinate more exhibitions with universities around the US to display materials for our Heritage Archive Initiative.

Register Today

INTRODUCING THE Graduate Student Knowledgebase

Being part of the Knowledgebase provides opportunities to connect with fellow graduate students in similar fields, to attend networking, to participate in educational events/workshops held by the Assyrian Studies Association, and get acquainted with various resources to help you with your graduate endeavors.



To register, please visit:
www.assyrianstudiesassociation.org/gradschoolknowledgebase

Photo Credit:Harvard University

Grants

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR OUR CHILDREN'S/POPULAR BOOK GRANT

Deadline: Jan. 31, 2023

The Assyrian Studies Association's Children's & Popular Book Grant is an annual grant of up to \$2,000 for an emergent writer or already published author. This grant is intended to support the publication of an Assyrian-related children's book or popular book.

The grantee may choose to use the grant for activities that include, but are not limited to:

- Printing costs
- Workshops, seminars, conferences
- Illustration costs
- Editing costs

Application Requirements:

- You must be an emerging writer who is unpublished, or an already published author. (No prior writing or publishing experience is required).
- Have a manuscript in-progress (1,000-2,000 words at minimum for popular book applicants and up to 1,000 word minimum for children's book applicants)
- A resume or biographical statement
- A cover letter that gives a sense of the applicant's book, and briefly states how the grant funds will be used
- Submit by: January 31, 2023

To submit an application, please visit our website: www.AssyrianStudiesAssociation.org/bookgrants

Previous Grant Winners



Right to Left: Romane Iskaria, 2021 winner; Rachel Sarah Thomas, 2020 winner; Sarah Ego, 2020 winner; and Ashor Sworesho, 2020 winner.

ANNOUNCING OUR NEWEST ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER, DR. JULYE BIDMEAD

The Assyrian Studies Association announces the appointment of our newest Advisory Board Member, Dr. Julye Bidmead. She is currently the Director of the Center for Undergraduate Excellence and Associate Professor in Religious Studies at Chapman University, Orange CA, where she teaches classes, such as “Deities, Demons, and Monsters: Mesopotamian Myths,” “Genesis and Gender,” “Archaeology of the Ancient Near East,” and “Deconstructing Hogwarts: Religion, Race, and Gender in Harry Potter.” Prior to Chapman, she taught at Miami University (OH) and California State University, Fresno.

Dr. Bidmead holds a Ph.D. in Religion from Vanderbilt University, focusing on the religions and cultures of ancient Israel, Canaan, and Mesopotamia. She has held supervisory positions at many archaeological digs in Israel, including the Megiddo Expedition, Lahav Research Project, and the Jezreel Expedition. Her publications include *The Akitu Festival: Religious Continuity and Royal Legitimation in Mesopotamia*, *Invest Your Humanity*, and numerous articles on Near Eastern religions, ritual studies, magic, and gender. Dr. Bidmead is currently finishing a manuscript, *Recovering Women's Rituals in the Ancient Near East*, that uncovers and examines women's religious and domestic rituals in antiquity. Her next project, *Harry Potter: A Guide for the Critical, Caring, and Curious*, a collaboration with her undergraduate students, explores the historical, religious, and social contexts of the Harry Potter series for a young adult audience.

The Assyrian Studies Association is honored to have Dr. Bidmead join our Advisory Board. With her various publications about the Assyrians, Dr. Bidmead provides our Board of Advisors with a wide variety of academic expertise.



Dr. Julye Bidmead.

PREVIOUS EVENT:

KEEPING CULTURE ALIVE: ASSYRIANS, THEN AND NOW WITH SARGON DONABED

On November 3, 2022, Dr. Sargon Donabed, Professor of History and Cultural Studies at Roger Williams University and Sarah Graff, Curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) presented at the *Keeping Culture Alive: Assyrians, Then and Now* held at the Assyrian Relief Court at The Met.

The topic of discussion included how modern-day Assyrians have inherited a complex cultural legacy derived from the Assyrian Empire, which reached its peak three thousand years ago. Moreover, the conversation also focused on continuity and change, and took an in-depth look at a remarkable object in the Met's collection: a sickle sword, inscribed with the name of an Assyrian king of the Late Bronze Age. The ancient tradition of imbuing special weapons with divine power finds its own parallels in present-day cultures, some more surprising than others.



Photo Credit: Alexandra Lazar.

PREVIOUS EVENT:

THE STORY OF ART AND THE ART OF STORIES: LIVING CULTURE FROM MESOPOTAMIA TO NEW YORK

On August 27, the Assyrian Studies Association (ASA) hosted a special panel discussion, *The Story of Art and the Art of Stories: Living Culture from Mesopotamia to New York*, with Assyrian-Iraqi artist Nenous Thabet, Iraqi-American activist and poet Ahmed Badr at The Assyrian Sculpture Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) in New York City. The discussion also featured introductions by Dr. Sarah Graff, the Curator of Ancient Near Eastern Art for the MET, who spoke on the importance of preserving and cherishing Assyrian art through educational events, and guest speaker Reine Hanna, Executive Director of the Assyrian Policy Institute (API) who discussed the API work in bringing issues of Assyrian cultural heritage to members of political office in the United States. The event was moderated by Professor of History and Cultural Studies at Roger Williams University and Board Member at ASA, Dr. Sargon Donabed who also served as translator.



Left to Right: Nenous Thabet, Ahmed Badr, and Sargon Donabed.

The panel discussion, moderated by Dr. Donabed, included an in-depth conversation between Nenous and Ahmed's cultural preservation processes and how they both engage in different artistic avenues to honor both Assyrian and Iraqi culture and heritage. Nenous, a sculptor and painter from Bakhdida, a town in Iraq's Nineveh Plains, a region invaded by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL). He made international headlines at the age of sixteen for sculpting Lamassus as an act of defiance against ISIS's destruction of Assyrian antiquities.

At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, upon entering the Assyrian Sculpture Court where two prominently placed lamassus stand, Nenous was faced with the feeling of "powerfulness and closeness." Being in the same room as the Lamassus, ancient protective deities that once were prominent in the Nineveh Plains, Nenous expressed his hope that "one day these artifacts could return home for everyone to appreciate again because these are pieces from our history and hold a lot of meaning and power."



Left: Sarah Graff, Curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC.

Ahmed, whose work seeks to combine poetry, archival collections, and other multi-media to explore the complexities of migration, identity, and self-expression, with a focus on reframing and reclaiming the power of tragedy, felt a deep connection to the Assyrian antiquities. Born in Baghdad, Iraq, Ahmed was familiar with Assyrian art and, “felt a sense of responsibility to engage with these [artifacts], a sense of appreciation...and that all these artifacts tell a story that need to be articulated in a way that’s making meaning of this space, your relationship with this space, and the objects in this space,” said Ahmed. In 2019, Ahmed’s organization, Narratio, which provides a platform for activates, supporting, and highlighting the creative expression of displaced young people through fellowships, collaborated with the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Ancient Near East Department in 2019 to host poetry performances by resettled refugee youth and a series of local and national photography and writing exhibits. For him, being back in this space “I’ve always found it [The Assyrian Sculpture Court] to be inviting...it’s a space that’s alive and I feel a sense of responsibility to engage with these objects, and I’m grateful for it,” said Ahmed.

The event at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was made possible with support from the Assyrian Arts Institute, the Assyrian Policy Institute, and the Assyrian Studies Association. Special thanks to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the collaboration.



Left to Right: Denise Sarguis Brown, Dr. Ruth Kambar, Violet Lazari, and Emma Lazar.



Right to Left: Ahmed Badr, Alexandra Lazar, and Nenous Thabet.

RESEARCH ARTICLE FROM ASA'S BOARD:

THE EXISTENTIAL THREAT OF ACADEMIC BIAS: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ANTI-ASSYRIAN RHETORIC

by Dr. Sargon Donabed,
Professor at Roger Williams University, Department of
History and Cultural Studies
and Board Member at Assyrian Studies Association

(Excerpt from Dr. Sargon Donabed's article.
To read the full article, please visit our website for the [link](#).)



Dr. Sargon Donabed

Since the (re)discovery of Mesopotamia and Assyria by the Western world in the early middle 19th century, there have been a variety of shifts in the demography, culture, and politics of the region. These shifts accompanied the external or etic views of peoples and communities of the region that influenced the local emic identities and perceptions of self and other. Over time, Western scholars and scholars from the region shaped narratives of history, culture, language, and heritage that often subsumed, relegated, or negated entirely the experiences and histories of marginalized and minoritized groups of the Middle East including, but not limited to, the Assyrians. Much of this is done through epistemic violence and is steeped, for the purposes of this paper, in language.

Since the (re)discovery of Mesopotamia and Assyria by the Western world in the early middle 19th century, there have been a variety of shifts in the demography, culture, and politics of the region. These shifts accompanied the external or etic views of peoples and communities of the region that influenced the local emic identities and perceptions of self and other. Over time, Western scholars and scholars from the region shaped narratives of history, culture, language, and heritage that often subsumed, relegated, or negated entirely the experiences and histories of marginalized and minoritized groups of the Middle East including, but not limited to, the Assyrians. Much of this is done through epistemic violence and is steeped, for the purposes of this paper, in language.

Some readers may recognize, as Edward Said once aptly noted, that this Orientalism, as he termed it, is supported by “institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.”¹

Knowledge no longer requires application to reality; knowledge is what gets passed on silently, without comment, from one text to another. Ideas are propagated and disseminated anonymously, they are repeated without attribution; they have literally become *Idée reçue*: what matters is that they are there, to be repeated, echoed, and re-echoed uncritically.²

Although Said suggested that this process created an accepted view of the “other,” the definition does not seem to be applied equally. In fact, the trend in Middle East studies has become to accept and promote those majoritarian narratives of the Middle East as a response to Western Orientalism. Unfortunately, this is done just as uncritically, as it assumes that the Middle East has no agency. This poses an epistemic and empirical conundrum whereby history and historiography of the region that are written to counter Western, Orientalist, and often racist narratives of people and places in the Middle East also sometimes can exclude, unimagine, and minoritize other communities in the region.

Citations

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage Books, 1978), 2.
2. *Ibid*, 116.

ON FAIDA

by Charles McGowan,
Assyrian Studies Association Research Intern
and Historic Preservation Major at
Roger Williams University

Faida, and the larger archeological expanse covered under the Land of Nineveh Archeological Project offers a chance to investigate the extensive water management systems of the Assyrian Empire and a unique opportunity to research the iconography used by the Assyrians under the reign of King Sennacherib who ruled from 704-681 BC. In my experience as a student of Historic Preservation and Art and Architectural History, aqueducts and canal systems are often considered a Roman achievement. Assyrian canals and aqueducts have never been discussed in my education, so although

I knew that the aqueduct and canal were not a Roman invention, it was not until I encountered the archeological site of Faida that I began to learn about the complex architectural water management systems of the Assyrians. In fact, according to translations of cuneiform tablets from the 13th century BC, Ancient Assyria constructed large scale irrigation systems. [1]

King Sennacherib has been credited with the construction of the canal found on the Faida archeological site, which is a very small part of the very extensive canal and aqueduct systems found within the surrounding area. In total the area under investigation totals to around 3,000 km which, were once the hinterlands of the Assyrian capitals Nineveh and Khorsabad. [2] It contains over 1,140 archeological sites under various degrees of preservation. Faida, which is one of a handful of sites of the 1,140 which has detailed and well-preserved stone reliefs depicting both King Sennacherib and the gods and goddesses of ancient Assyria. Therefore, Faida offers unique opportunities to learn more about the canal systems built under King Sennacherib and achieve a greater understanding of the unique symbolism that occurred under his reign.

Sennacherib has been known to use imagery in different ways than his predecessors. Evidence for this lies within his royal palace in Nineveh where we see unique combinations of religious iconography and the use of multiple colossi of varying types.[3] For instance, in Sennacherib's royal palace, the rooms of the Southwest Palace only depict military actions and campaigns. These depictions are even in storerooms where visitors would not have seen them. Other portions of the palace "used apotropaic figures selectively" [4] in combinations. The purposes of this imagery have yet to be precisely identified; however, what is clear is that Sennacherib differed significantly from his predecessor Sargon II. Faida contains imagery that is seemingly easier to interpret. However, not all the rock cut reliefs yet to be uncovered and investigated, which makes preservation and investigating the site an urgent undertaking. Gaining a better understanding for the imagery of Faida could prove extremely useful tools in the analysis of other Assyrian sites, such as the palace of Sennacherib, which is still not completely understood.

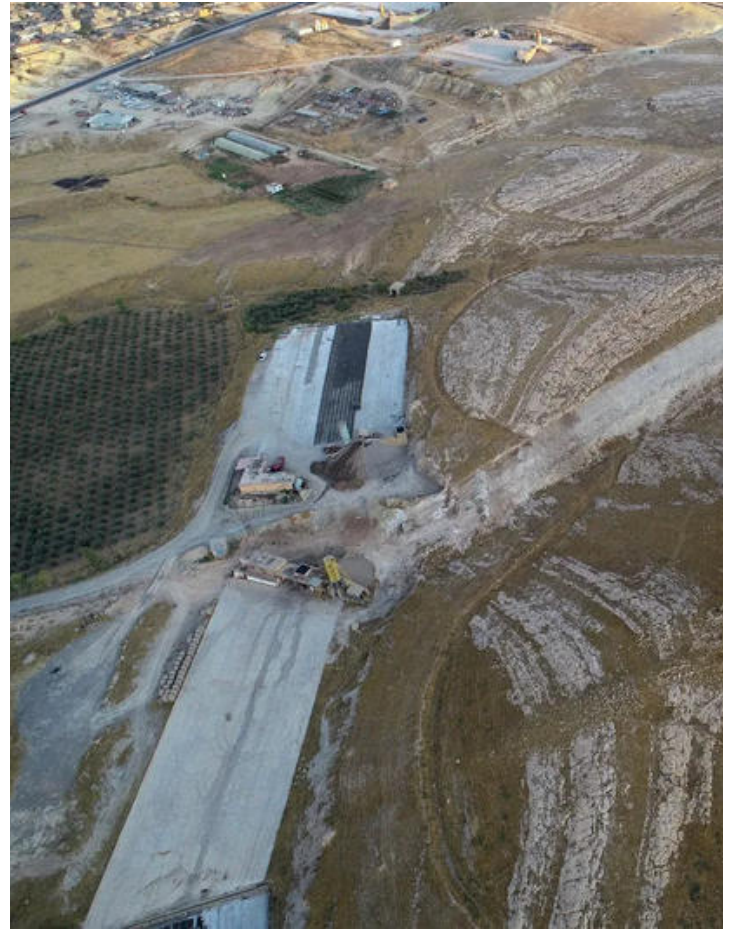
It would be detrimental, however, to only consider Faida for its archeological importance, and not within the wider context of the local area it inhabits. While Faida - and the rest of the sites associated with the Land of Nineveh Archeological Project - need to be accessed for how they affected the local agriculture during their creation and use, an assessment must be made regarding the local region today.



Charles McGowan, ASA Research Intern.



The procession of god statues (Credits: photo A. Savioli, LoNAP)



A drone shot of the canal and the factories besieging it (Credits: photo A. Savioli, LoNAP)

It is clear through the works of Professor Daniele Morandi Bonacossi that, “The ultimate goal of these undertakings is to propose to the KRG authorities the creation of an archeological park of the Assyrian irrigation system and to prepare all the necessary documentation to recommend this unique complex...for the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List.”[5] This would mean the ultimate protection of Faida, but it also brings the site under international attention and scrutiny. Being made a UNESCO world heritage site means preserving the site under rules established with the help of UNESCO.

The objective of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention is the “protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.”[6] However, UNESCO also takes into consideration living heritage, which UNESCO defines as “inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants.”[7] In my opinion, this means that for Faida to be considered for the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List, an investigation of how the local and international Assyrian Population relate to the Faida site. Furthermore, those findings must be considered when preserving and investigating the Faida site in order to comply with UNESCO’s goal of safeguarding living heritage.

Citations

1. Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Water for Nineveh. The Nineveh Irrigation System in the regional context of the ‘Assyrian Triangle: A first Geoarchaeological Assessment.
2. Stefania Ermidoro, “In the Field”: The Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project, IAA 2022
3. David Kertai, The Architecture of Late Assyrian Royal Palaces, Oxford Press, Oxford, UK. 128
4. The Architecture of Late Assyrian Royal Palaces, 128
5. Twelve Royal Stelas for Twelve Great Gods: New discoveries at the Khinis Monumental Complex, Ash-Sharq Volume 2 No 2 (2018), 78.
6. UNESCO, About World Heritage, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/about/>
7. UNESCO, “Living Heritage and Education, The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, 2019

INTERVIEW: ESTHER ELIA, WINNER OF THE 2022 ASSYRIAN ACADEMIC RESEARCH GRANT

by Alexandra Lazar,
Executive Director, Assyrian Studies Association

Esther Elia was born and raised in Turlock, California. She received a BFA in Illustration from California College of the Arts in 2019, and is currently getting a Masters of Fine Arts in Painting from the University of New Mexico. Her work focuses on the Assyrian experience, the maintaining and creation of culture in diaspora, through sculpture and large-scale paintings. She, along with other Assyrian visual artists, is working to combat the notion that Assyrian Art can and does only exist within the ancient past (along with the people) by the telling of contemporary oral histories, painting living Assyrian faces, speaking and examining the Assyrian language, and documenting Assyrian culture as it continues to grow and shift both in our indigenous homeland and in diaspora.

Esther's work is a mix of sculptural furniture pieces, clothing, and large scale acrylic paintings that use family folklore as the basis for understanding mixed ethnicity and the question of how to be Assyrian in diaspora. Her work in the past has focused on the refugee experience, and has shifted more recently to trying to document the pursuit of safety. Additionally, she began documenting oral histories from Assyrian family members stemming from the 1915 Armenian, Assyrian, Greek Genocide, and is committed to adding to a burgeoning movement of contemporary Assyrian art.

Most recently, the Assyrian Studies Association interviewed Esther in October 2022 to discuss her work and how becoming the Assyrian Studies Association's Assyrian Academic Research Grant recipient has impacted her project.

(interview begins)

Alexandra (A): How do you think winning this grant will help your project?

Esther (E): Ideally, I want to make multiple prayer bowls and with the funds, it will help me create exhibitions where I can display these prayer bowls where Assyrians live like in the US, Australia, Iraq, France, Germany, and so forth. Part of the exhibition will also be an audible experience where people can also listen to prayer submissions.



Esther Elia writing an Assyrian prayer in her crafted bowl.



Assyrian Prayer Bowl.



Esther discussing one of her Assyrian Prayer Bowls to an audience. Photos Credit: Esther Elia.

A: Can you tell us more about the Assyrian Prayer Bowl and your ultimate goal for this project?

E: I have always been interested in language, the importance of language in part because I grew up in a house where we didn't speak Assyrian and I felt that a vital piece of the Assyrian experience I wasn't engaging with. So this project was born out of several things such as expressing my Assyrian identity through creating the Assyrian Prayer bowls. I am also learning the Assyrian language and I was taken with the concept that words could be taken so seriously to create healing. So the ultimate goal of this project is to offer some kind of healing to our Assyrian community as we read our stories through these prayer bowls through an exhibition. I want to create both a visual and audible experience of who we are because part of the exhibition is also hearing the voices of those who submitted their prayers for the bowls. Hearing the voices of our people as a living and breathing community that is still creating and very much thriving is very important.

A: You describe that you are trying to learn Assyrian given that you grew up in a household that didn't necessarily speak Assyrian. You also mentioned that you are trying to express to your Assyrian identity by creating Assyrian Prayer Bowls. Could you argue that your desire to connect with the Assyrian community is one of your main inspirations for this project?

E: It's definitely a huge part of this project. The viewing our words and the viewing our history through these prayer bowls that relates specifically to us [Assyrians] since Assyrians have been doing prayer bowls for thousands of years. I want to connect and make something useful for the Assyrian community to be part of.

A: What is the most rewarding part of completing a prayer bowl?

E: It's very rewarding when the prayer bowl is finished because of how beautiful they are and it's also rewarding when someone submits a prayer submissions because it took effort for them.

However, another rewarding part is watching people look at a completed bowls. I recently had a show at the Assyrian National Convention and watching people interacting with the bowls and naturally reading the bowls aloud was so amazing! It was so much better than I imagined.

A: What do you think people outside of the Assyrian community could take from viewing your exhibition?

E: I see a bunch of bowls at different heights around the room with directed speakers with people speaking about the Assyrian experience in a multitude of languages. I think the hearing and seeing is powerful experience for non-Assyrians to be part of. I also think there is so few spaces for people to view Assyria and i'm hoping that for a non-Assyrian to come in and look at my bowls that have words on them that express hope for our future and the passion for our community will be memorable for them.

A: How could we submit a prayer for the Assyrian Prayer Bowl?

R: I'm glad you asked! Please visit my website <https://www.estherestheresther.com> and upload your prayer in written form as well as a voice memo of your prayer. You can also email me at helloestherelia@gmail.com if that's easier for you!

RESEARCH ARTICLE FROM ASA'S ADVISORY BOARD:

THE 1924 EXPULSION OF THE ASSYRIANS OF URFA

by Dr. Mark Tomass,[1]
Economist and Advisory Board Member, Assyrian
Studies Association



Dr. Mark Tomass

(Excerpt from Mark Tomass's article. To read the full article,
please visit our website for the link.)

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 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

Footnotes

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
2. Amir Harrak, ‘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.

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 Shammas. 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 Shammas (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 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.

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.

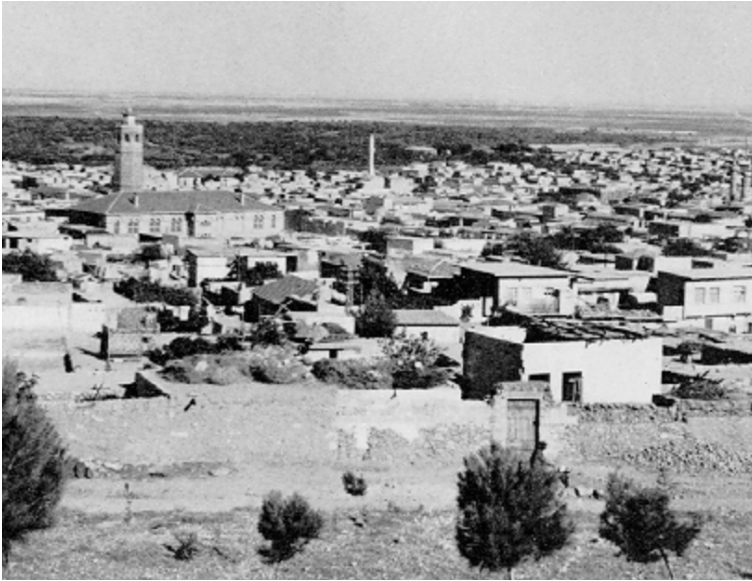
A single protest in Istanbul on September 30, 1894, initiated the trend of mass murders. Groups of Armenians, estimated between 500 and 2000, assembled at Kumqapı, near the Armenian Patriarchate, and marched toward the grand vizier's offices to voice their "grievances." The Social Democrat Hunchakian Party partly organized the event.[9] Philip Currie, the British Ambassador to Istanbul, declared the demonstrators "were armed with pistols and knives of a uniform pattern," implying that organizers had distributed the weapons.[10] 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." [11]

Footnotes

5. An informal interview conducted by the author in 1978 with Archdeacon Abd al-Ghani Shammas, one of the author's distant uncles and the Archdeacon 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 Shammas.



Ancient Urfa. Credits: ancientneareast.tripod.com



An Assyrian family from Urfa in 1904. Credits: YaqoGarshon_OG

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.[12] 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.[13] Between October and December, hundreds of Christians were converted to Islam. [14] 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.[15]

Footnotes

8. In 1979, the author informally interviewed Mr. Yaqoub Saghir, a first-generation Urfalli 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 Shammās, the author's maternal grandfather, was being used then as a government branch office (Arabic: Shucbah, Turkish: Shoba).
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. "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.
15. Fitzmaurice (Urfa) to Currie, 10 September 1896, United Kingdom National Archives, Foreign Office: Embassy and Consulates, Turkey, General Correspondence 195 / 1930.

Seeking Speakers of the Urmian Dialect

Shlamalokhoun!

A graduate student from the University of Puerto Rico is seeking for native Assyrians and first generation American-born speakers of the Urmian dialect of Assyrian who live in the US to volunteer for a research project in linguistics. We are studying the intergenerational shift in Urmian-Assyrian consonants. Participants will read a set of Assyrian words and the sound would be recorded. The interview shall be conducted online via Zoom (or in-person, if possible) and will remain completely anonymous. The process would take approximately 15 minutes. Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Contact:
Daniel Rivera
PhD Candidate
Department of English
University of Puerto Rico
acorduende@gmail.com





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