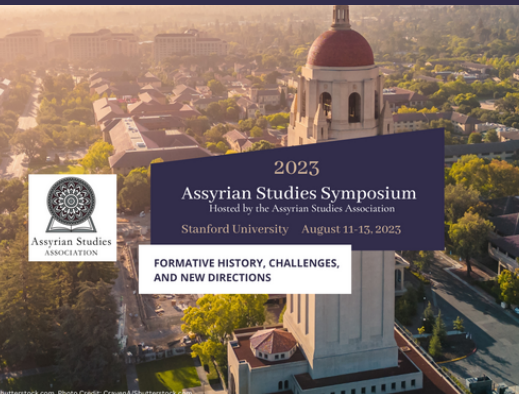


June/July 2023

ASSYRIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Quarterly Newsletter

Vol. 2 Issue 1



REGISTER FOR THE 2023 ASA SYMPOSIUM

Join us at Stanford University August 11-13, 2023, for the Assyrian Studies Symposium.

Read more on pp. 1-2

WELCOMING MARIAM GEORGIS TO OUR BOARD OF ADVISORS

We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Mariam Georges as our newest Advisory Board member who brings her invaluable expertise and insights to the Assyrian Studies Association.

Read more on p. 5

INTRODUCING SMILING SCHOLAR

We are thrilled to help announce Tiamat Warda's Smiling Scholar, a transformative mentoring service dedicated to empowering students through personalized guidance and support.

Read more on pp. 8-9



Assyrian Studies
ASSOCIATION

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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 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.



Assyrian Studies
ASSOCIATION

2023
**ASSYRIAN
STUDIES
SYMPOSIUM**

Hosted by the Assyrian Studies Association



MORE INFORMATION



Friday, August 11 –
Sunday, August 13,
2023



Stanford
University's
Humanities Center

REGISTRATION DATES



Early bird registration
is **now open**.



Early bird registration
closes on July 15



Standard
registration begins
on July 16 thru
August 13

The Assyrian Studies Association (ASA) is hosting a three-day symposium at Stanford University from August 11-13, 2023, with the theme of exploring the ways in which Assyrian Studies has emerged across various disciplines in academia. ASA encourages scholars to reimagine how engaging in the field of Assyrian studies has prompted them to pursue research that focuses on preserving, continuing, and inclusively presenting the Assyrian cultural heritage while pushing boundaries.

All are welcome to attend!

If you would like to present your research at our symposium, apply at www.ASASymposium.com



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STANFORD
HUMANITIES
CENTER



2023
Assyrian Studies Symposium

Sponsorship Opportunities



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Full acknowledgment before and during event, including on all social media pages.

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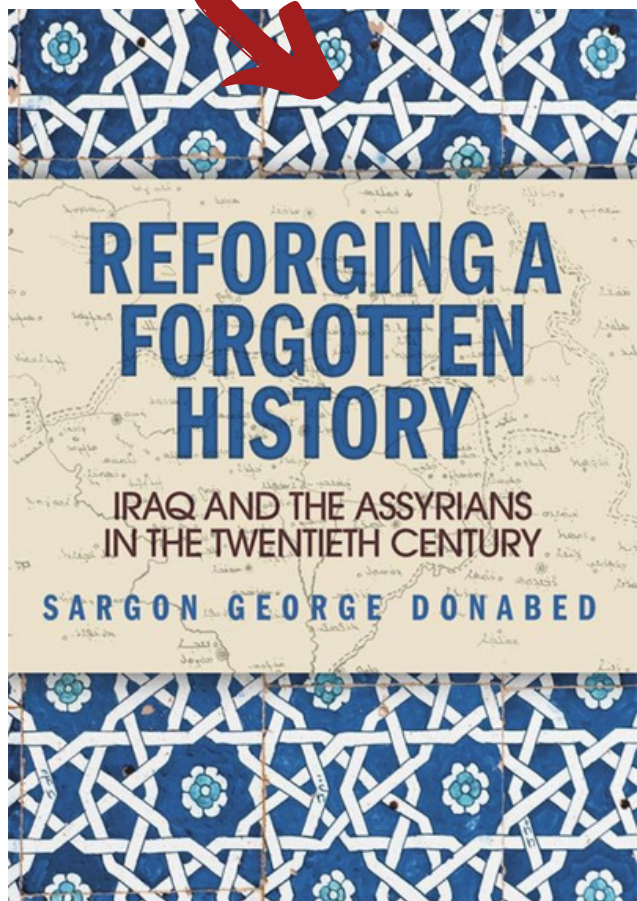
Roger Williams
University



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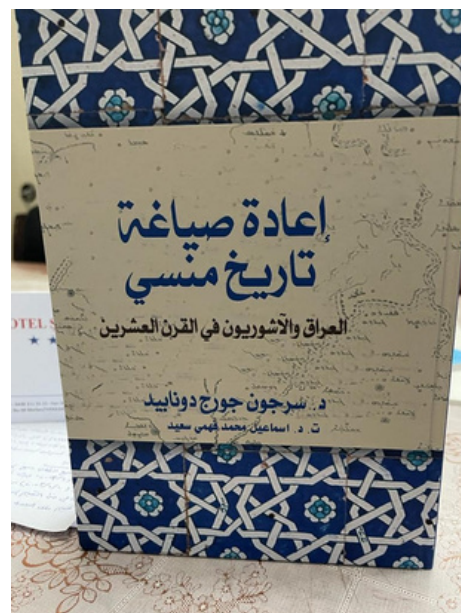
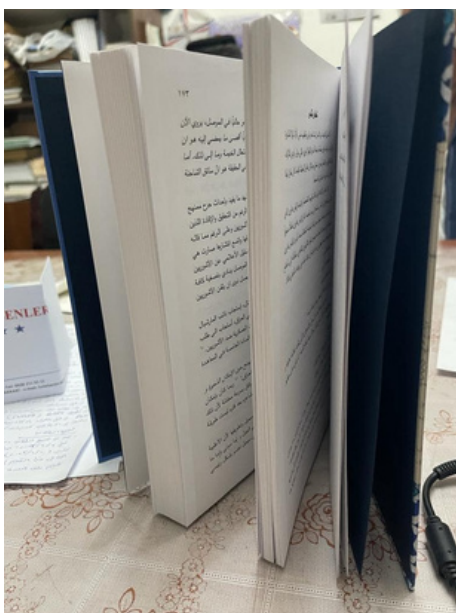
Sargon Donabed's *Reforging a Forgotten History; Iraq and the Assyrians in the Twentieth Century*

Now Available in Arabic!



Author Sargon Donabed provides a comprehensive overview of the modern Assyrian story, merging emic and etic perspectives of the Assyrian's struggle to attain sovereignty over the past century and beyond. His work offers both an informative source for Assyrian ethnic history and an alternative reading for Mesopotamian regional history as a whole. Nabil Al-Tikriti, University of Mary Washington, "In telling the story of modern Assyrian responses to a history of tragedy, Sargon Donabed helps us understand them as actors in their own right. He thereby rewrites Iraqi history from the perspective of the oppressed. No longer may we ignore the plight of this misunderstood minority." Paul S. Rowe, Trinity Western University "Who are the Assyrians and what role did they play in shaping modern Iraq? Were they simply bystanders, victims of collateral damage who played a passive role in its history? Furthermore, how have they negotiated their position throughout various periods of Iraq's state-building processes?" This book details a narrative of Iraq in the twentieth century and refashions the Assyrian experience as an integral part of Iraq's broader contemporary historiography. It is the first comprehensive account to contextualize a native experience alongside the emerging state.

Image: Cambridge University Press.



Images: Gabriel Georges.

MEET STANFORD'S HUMANITIES CENTER NEW ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, HELEN MALKO

The Stanford Humanities Center is welcomed its new Associate Director, Dr. Helen Malko, who joined the staff on January 9, 2023. In her role, Malko supports Director Roland Greene's vision for the Center and oversees the day-to-day operations, including programming and events that serve more than 40 research fellows as well as the Stanford community more broadly.

Malko comes to Stanford from the American Center of Research (ACOR) in Amman, Jordan. Before joining ACOR, she worked at Columbia University in New York, where she managed various academic programs and projects in the Department of Art History and Archaeology and the Middle East Institute. She was the Program Manager for the Mellon Fellowship Program for Emerging Displaced Scholars at Columbia's Global Center in Amman.

She has been awarded multiple fellowships at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Columbia University (Department of Art History and Archaeology and the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies). Her research centers on archaeology and cultural heritage of the Middle East, cultural representation in museums, and cultural memory. She holds a PhD in Anthropology and Archaeology from Stony Brook University and a MA and BA degree from Baghdad University. In addition, she has conducted field work and projects in Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan and is a member of the Columbia University project, Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments.

Malko's recent publications include "Heritage Wars: A Cultural Genocide in Iraq" in *Cultural Genocide: Law, Politics, and Global Manifestations*, ed. Jeffrey Bachman (Routledge, 2019), a co-authored article "Parthian Rock Reliefs in Iraqi Kurdistan" in *Iraq* 2019, the BISI Journal, and "The Kassites of Babylonia: A Re-examination of an Ethnic Identity," in *Studies and the Sealand and Babylonia under the Kassites*, eds. Susanne Paulus and Tim Clayden (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

The complete article can be read on Stanford's Humanities Center website:

<https://shc.stanford.edu/stanford-humanities-center/news/meet-humanities-centers-new-associate-director-helen-malko>



Dr. Helen Malko, Associate Director at the Stanford Humanities Center



ANNOUNCING OUR NEWEST ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER, DR. MARIAM GEORGES

Dr. Mariam Georgis is an Assistant Professor of Global Indigeneity at the Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. She recently was a Research Affiliate at Mamawipawin: Centre for Indigenous Governance and Community Based Research (Canada). She recently completed a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Department of Political Studies and Mamawipawin: Centre for Indigenous Governance and Community Based Research at the University of Manitoba (Canada). Originally from what is today known as Iraq, she currently resides in and is sustained by Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and Haudenosaunee territory (Canada). She holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Alberta specializing in International Relations and Comparative Politics of the global South. Her work focuses on Indigenous feminist decolonial/postcolonial approaches to global politics, critical security studies, race and Indigeneity, global colonialism/decolonization, violence and nation-building, politics of southwest Asia (Middle East) with a focus on Indigenous Politics.

She is the co-author of "Indigenizing International Relations: Insights from Centring Indigeneity in Canada and Iraq" (2021), "Violence on Iraqi bodies: decolonising economic sanctions in security studies" (2019), and the author of "The Rise of ISIS in Post invasion Iraq: A Manifestation of (Neo)colonial Violence" (2023) and "Nation and Identity Construction in Modern Iraq: (Re)inserting the Assyrians" (2017). Her most recent publication is a chapter in a volume in, *The Myth of Middle East Exceptionalism*. (A preview of the chapter is shown below)



Dr. Mariam Georgis, Assyrian Studies Association Advisory Board Member.

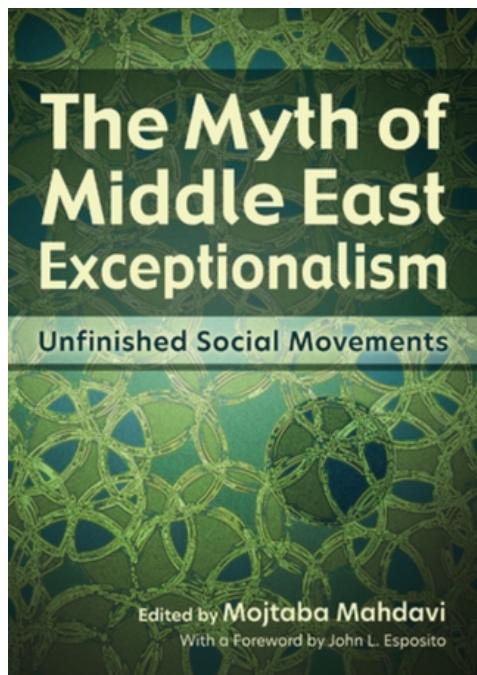
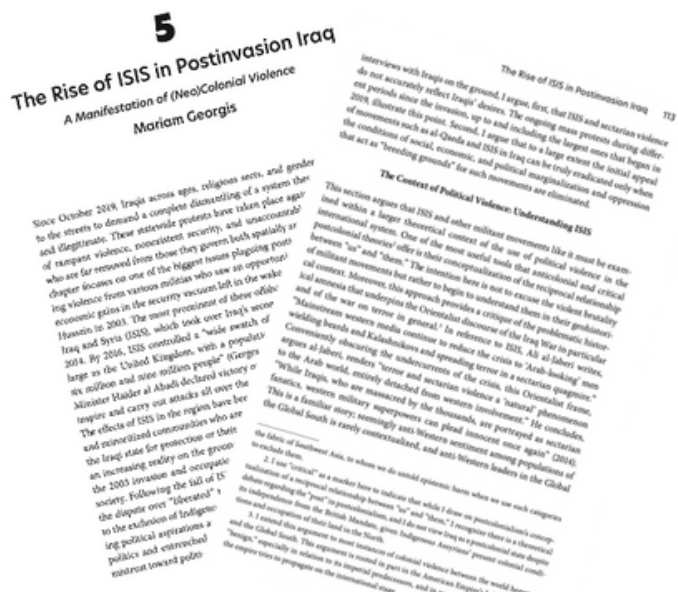


Photo Credit: Syracuse University Press.



PUBLICATION BY ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER:

"THE GREEK MINORITY'S FATE IN THE FORMER OTTOMAN EMPIRE AS A HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS" IN THE GENOCIDE OF THE CHRISTIAN POPULATIONS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND ITS AFTERMATH (1908-1923)

Hannibal Travis
 Advisory Board Member, Assyrian Studies Association
 Professor of Law, Florida International University



Hannibal Travis, Assyrian Studies Association Advisory Board Member and Professor of Law at Florida International University.



THE GENOCIDE OF THE CHRISTIAN POPULATIONS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND ITS AFTERMATH (1908-1923)

Edited by
 Taner Akcam, Theodosios Kyriakidis
 and Kyriakos Chatzikyriakidis



10
 The Greek Minority's Fate in the Former Ottoman Empire as a Human Rights Crisis

Hannibal Travis
 DOI: 10.4129/9781000202721-14

Human Rights Norms for the Greek Plight in Turkey

The Greek Orthodox minority in Turkey is the occasional focus of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations that issue reports on human rights. After the massacres of the 20th century, including in 1955, and the deportation in 1964 of tens of thousands of native Greeks, the minority was reduced to 2,500 persons, perhaps 4,000 in 2008. Reports on the rights of the dwindling Greek minority in Turkey tend to address issues of language and religious properties, with land rights and restitution being less frequent topics of analysis.¹

Property Rights

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled several times on the seizure of properties belonging to the ethnic Greek minority in Turkey.² The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate filed more than 20 cases before that court but contended that it had actually lost thousands of properties.³

Human rights law generally guarantees property rights against lawless or unnecessary interference.⁴ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights focuses on the right to exclude others from one's "home" unless the state has a non-arbitrary reason to take or enter the home, while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other instruments provide for a broader right to enjoy one's property.⁵

Victims of genocide and other grave violations of human rights should have a right to restitution of properties, especially homes and sacred buildings, arbitrarily or unlawfully expropriated from them. The UN Commission on Human Rights has recognized this basic principle.⁶ The principle arguably served as the basis of post-war settlements in nations stricken by genocide, such as Bosnia, Cambodia, northern Iraq, Kosovo, East Timor, and Rwanda.⁷ It is also reflected in Security Council resolutions and European Court decisions on occupied northern Cyprus.⁸

The moral or ethical right to property restitution and the reclamation of homes in particular often have a retrospective effect. While treaties and human rights generally enter into force upon a date certain related to signature and ratification and have primarily a prospective effect thereafter, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is a backward-looking treaty in many respects, as noted by the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group.⁹ Its very terms, including its preamble recognizing that genocide was a crime that existed at all periods of history, may trigger an exception to the rule that treaties apply looking forward.¹⁰ As a declaratory document, it restates binding moral principles from which there is no opt-out for states.¹¹

Courts may someday exercise jurisdiction over human rights violations that preceded their own establishment or the articulation of statutory or treaty norms protecting specific rights. For example, while it was difficult or impossible to sue a foreign government in the United States for a discriminatory taking of property as of the 1940s, the Supreme Court ruled in 2004 that it would apply evolving statutory and judge-

Konstantinos Fotiadis has greatly advanced our understanding of the fate of Orthodoxy in Pontos and Eastern Thrace in particular. He observes,

Having provided refuge to persecuted Christians since the time they were established, monasteries and convents sanctification of violence and

made principles of international law in such disputes.¹² Citing a "number of expressions of federal executive and legislative support for recognition of the Armenian Genocide," a court in the United States exercised jurisdiction over claims that insurance companies were unjustly enriched, among other things, by refusing to pay the proceeds of life insurance policies on dead or disappeared Armenians.¹³ The same court, sitting in full, reversed this decision, but the initial decision may be a harbinger of a more ethical rather than

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PREVIOUS EVENT:

RETHINKING THE MIDDLE EAST FROM THE MARGINS: CREATING SPACE FOR MINORITIZED NARRATIVES

On March 16, 2023 The University of Arizona's School of Anthropology held their 30th Annual Sabbagh Lecture with a special guest from the Assyrian Studies Association's Board Member, Dr. Sargon Donabed.

Using specific examples from the Assyrian community in the Middle East and specifically Iraq. This presentation focused on the real-world dynamic of how minoritized or marginalized and alternative narratives provide a better understanding for more integrated and representative knowledge of Middle Eastern communities and the region. This perspective includes when, where, how, and why peoples imagine and reimagine themselves from the periphery to the mainstream.

"The Sabbagh lecture experience was a balance of kind, wonderful, and engaged faculty, students, and members of the public in Tucson. Such a wonderful community and I am deeply thankful for the opportunity" - Dr. Donabed.

Sargon George Donabed is a writer and holds a Ph.D. in Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations from the University of Toronto and a post-graduate degree in Anthrozoology/Animal Studies. He is a Professor of History and Cultural Studies at Roger Williams University, and his focus consists of indigenous and marginalized communities as well as cultural continuity, storytelling, wonder, and re-enchancement. He is the creator and editor of the book series *Alternative Histories: Narratives from the Middle East and Mediterranean*.



Dr. Sargon Donabed chatting with attendees.



Left to Right: Dr. Hadil, Dr. Sargon Donabed, and Julie Sabbagh.



Center-Right: Dr. Sargon Donabed listening to opening speech by Dr. Nahrain Rasho.

INTERVIEW:

TIAMAT WARDA, PH.D. STUDENT AND CREATOR OF SMILING SCHOLAR

by Alexandra Lazar,
Executive Director, Assyrian Studies Association



Tiamat Warda is a Californian born Assyrian who is currently a PhD candidate in anthrozoology, the interdisciplinary study of relations and interactions between humans and other species, at the University of Exeter. Her research defines humane emotional labour in relationships between guide dogs and their instructors during their shared work-lives. Prior to her doctoral studies, Tiamat received an MA in anthrozoology from the University of Exeter in 2019. In 2023, she launched Smiling Scholar, offering virtual consultations to improve well-being, organization, publishing, deadline management, and more to students.

Most recently, the Assyrian Studies Association's Executive Director, Alexandra Lazar interviewed Tiamat in April 2023 to discuss her research and her launch of her new business, *Smiling Scholar* to help students around the globe.

(interview begins)

Alexandra (A): Can you tell me a little about yourself?

Tiamat (T): My name is Tiamat Warda. This year I'm finishing up my PhD at the University of Exeter in the field of anthrozoology (the study of dynamics and relationships between humans and other species). Now I live on Dartmoor, England, with my two dogs and partner. However, I completed my MA and most of my PhD as a distance-based student at the University of Exeter while living in Germany. Prior to moving to Germany, I grew up in California. I came across ASA after actively searching for other Assyrians in academia. How exciting it is to have found such a wonderful, supportive community, and I really look forward to meeting more of you.

A: You are currently at the University of Exeter pursuing a Ph.D. in anthrozoology. What led you to the field of anthrozoology and what areas are you particularly interested in?

T: My path to academia began while I was working as a guide dog instructor, after observing and experiencing first-hand many of the challenges that come with that line of work. After six years of training guide dogs in Germany, I decided to refocus from training the dogs to conducting research. My motivation was to be in a position where I can play a role within the assistance dog industry in ways which will (ideally) benefit how the dogs are trained. I am now able to do that as a result of my research, which has been incredibly rewarding! I focus on the crossroads of animal labour and emotion management with the goal to work walk the line between academia and industry to create and support meaningful, real-world impact.



Tiamat Warda, founder of Smiling Scholar.

A: Can you describe your research?

T: You've likely heard the term "emotional labour" before. It's a professional skill where a worker (regardless of their species) manages their emotions to present a professional demeanour in work-related interactions. The trouble is, there are different strategies you can use to do this, resulting in it being done either "humanely" or "inhumanely". My research defines the concept of interspecies emotional labour that is humane, using guide dogs and the instructors who train them at Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind as case studies. This is a greatly under-researched area, yet one which can directly impact the well-being, education, and work of both guide dogs and their instructors.

A: You recently launched Smiling Scholar, tell me a little about it.

T: I am happy to! Smiling Scholar is something I'm really passionate about, so I'll do my best to keep this short. There are many tutoring options out there for the researching and writing up aspects of being a student. What is less common are mentoring options for the "in between bits" of academia. Academia is notorious for being intimidating, stressful, and rigid. However, it can also be incredibly fun and personally enriching if you have the tools and mindset that work best for your individual situation. I love to help students find that for themselves!

A: Given that you are a busy Ph.D. student, what led you to the path of creating Smiling Scholar?

T: Throughout my MA and PhD, I was working full-time. Many students find themselves in a similar position, perhaps with additional care responsibilities. I needed to find ways of nevertheless remaining productive and enjoying what I do without burning out. I spent many years systematically learning how to do just that. As I learned more and more, I began sharing with peers and colleagues. For many, it was brand-new information that ended up transforming their academic experience from confusing and isolating to manageable and enjoyable. This led me to wonder why universities aren't offering more hands-on guidance in these areas, as I saw the difference it made to people. Being quite passionate about this topic, I began offering what I had been sharing for free for some years as a mentoring service to a wider audience. That is how Smiling Scholar was born!

A: What are some of the services you offer?

T: Smiling Scholar is a mentoring service that supports students (at all levels of university) with areas such as time management, networking and communication, publishing, organization and productivity, and personalized guidance around software and tools that can greatly improve your academic experience. You can learn more about it at www.smiling scholar.com or email me directly if you have questions: I would love to hear from you!

A: What do you think graduate students can take the most out of Smiling Scholar?

T: It seems that what most students grapple the most with is juggling work and school, well-being, remaining consistently productive to meet deadlines, and understanding, as well as following through with, publishing. For this reason, Smiling Scholar places these topics at the forefront of the mentoring sessions. Mentoring in these areas will likely be the most beneficial for many students interested in mentoring through Smiling Scholar.



ARTICLE BY MEMBER OF ASA'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

"THE ASSYRIANS OF SOUTH WEST ASIA: MODERN PEOPLE, ANCIENT PAST"

Dr. Helen Malko
Board Member, Assyrian Studies Association
Associate Director, Stanford Humanities Center

Article was originally published by the University of Helsinki's Ancient Near East Empires (ANEE)



Assyrian American Community at the Metropolitan Museum of Art during the event "The Story of Art and the Art of Stories: Living Culture from Mesopotamia to New York" co-organized with the Assyrian Studies Association. (Image: Alexandra Lazar)

I am Assyrian.

Oh, you are from Syria.

No, I am Assyrian.

What do you mean? The ancient people in the Bible?

But they are extinct!

The above is an example of a typical conversation an Assyrian individual experiences every time they are asked about their cultural and ethnic identity. Assyrian identity is contested by others, often without understanding or knowledge of the community, its culture, and traditions when mentioned in academia. What is usually granted to

their neighboring ethnocultural communities is often negated when it comes to the Assyrians, including their right to their name, culture, and homeland — fundamental human rights. Now reduced to a small group of people, who originated in Mesopotamia (mainly modern Iraq), modern Assyrians have survived a long history of genocides, suppression, displacement, and cultural cleansing. For this reason, when I was asked to write about how the modern Assyrian community engages with its ancient past, I decided to write from the point of view of the people themselves in an attempt to create a space that allows for an alternative narrative to be part of our understanding of this ancient culture and people—a narrative that goes beyond the typical colonial and nationalist storylines that dominate our schools, classrooms, and textbooks and engages with the people and their agency.

Assyrian Heritage: Between Colonialism and Nationalism

Nothing is more entangled with the mythicized and imagined Mesopotamia, the land between the two rivers, than its ancient heritage, especially Assyrian history, and material culture. Unfortunately, the study and understanding of the Assyrian archaeological heritage have been confined by colonialism and nationalism, which ignored and prevented any space that allows for communities' engagement, connections, and perspectives. Even today, this heritage remains framed within postcolonial and neo-colonial narratives, a product of Western appropriation of Mesopotamian cultures, all while excluding the later and current cultures and peoples, thus producing a present that disagrees with the past as constructed by the West. The resulting interpretations, especially those about the moral and political roles of ancient Assyrian rulers and kings, have been recycled over time and have become a stereotype. They now form the pillars of the study of ancient Assyria, directing our focus on Assyrian palaces, reliefs, and their ideology and propaganda.

Early excavations and "discoveries" were not the results of scientific interest in this region's civilizations, cultures, and people but rather the effects of Western understanding of the Bible and classical histories. European museums enriched and enlarged their offerings to visitors through excavations of Assyrian palaces and bas-reliefs, lamassu figures, and cuneiform inscriptions in the 1840s and 1850s. The art and monuments brought from the Orient offered the European audiences a dramatic insight into the savage, imperfect, and unknown world they called the Near East, all while providing them with biblical evidence, deep antiquity, and spectacular forms and monumental relics. All Assyrian monuments and artifacts were integrated into the canon of art history through which they were connected to Western art and architecture, alongside which they were exhibited and understood. This appropriation needed to isolate and disconnect this heritage from its original landscape and people who lived and continue to live side-by-side and interact with it, alienating related communities such as the Assyrians and making them "the other."

As scholars have repeatedly shown, this agenda went hand in hand with the Western geopolitical interests in this region, especially its oil, starting with the British occupation of Iraq in the 19th century and to this day. This entanglement of oil and antiquities was best demonstrated by the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the consequent control over oil resources alongside the unprecedented destruction, looting, and displacement of Mesopotamian cultural heritage, including Assyrian material culture and Assyrian people.

This ancient heritage was employed to build and solidify national identity to eliminate the Colonial monopoly and control over oil and antiquities in the postcolonial states. In Iraq, the Iraqi Nationalist movement of the 1960s, which overthrew British rule and attempted to reclaim oil production and antiquities of the land, used this heritage to serve the Pan-Arab, Pan-Islamic social context for the new state. During Saddam Hussein's era, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Sumerian cultures were utilized to construct an Iraqi national identity that distinguished Iraq and its people from the rest of the Arabic-speaking world and gave them their sociopolitical and cultural specificities. While employing this shared heritage to unify a people of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds to find common ground is not necessarily a harmful act nor unique to Iraq as a postcolonial state, Saddam manipulated these cultures to create an egocentric identity that served his image first and foremost. Such practices, unfortunately, continue to overshadow the Iraqis', in general, and the Assyrian community's, in particular, own connection to this heritage. Much has been published on how Saddam used the image of ancient Assyrian and Babylonian kings to align himself with powerful and famous historical figures and how he reconstructed the ancient city of Babylon and stamped its bricks with his name, thus planting himself not only in the present but also the past of this land. However, there is hardly any discussion of how Iraqi society and its ancient communities, including the Assyrians, see this heritage, how they connect with it, and why.

Today, Assyrian heritage remains hostage to a new era of colonialism on the one hand and local nationalism(s) on the other. In a fragmented Iraq, central and regional governments use this heritage to

serve their nationalist agendas, including or excluding communities. Assyrian ancient heritage is now being re-contextualized to fit a new political reality on Assyrian lands and re-write the region's history. The Assyrian material culture continues to be "discovered," packaged, and presented to Western audiences and academia without knowledge sharing or mutual collaboration. Foreign expeditions continue to exploit this heritage to serve their scientific and professional progress, all while neglecting the impact of their policies and practices on the local communities and their connection to this heritage.

A Native Perspective

It is well known that cultural heritage is not static nor frozen in time. In many parts of the world, cultural heritage is a living and evolving artistic process of meanings, memory, and memory-making and remaking. Rooted in the Assyrian homeland, modern Assyrians continuously engage with their ancient heritage through visits to ancient sites and monuments, songwriting, music, visual arts or language, dress, food, rituals, etc., evoking individual and collective identity and cultural memory. Assyrians, among other communities, were aware of this heritage before it was "discovered" by Western archaeologists and travelers. Several archaeological sites, including Nineveh, Maltai, Nerem/Gunduk, etc., were known to the local Assyrian communities across northern Mesopotamia. European travelers who passed by Nineveh, later Mosul, in the 16th and 17th centuries often noted that they were taken to the ruins of the ancient city by the locals who still called it by its Akkadian name Ninua/Ninwē: the very same name Assyrians call their ancient city even today. Similarly, Simon Rouet, a diplomat working for the French government in Baghdad, noted that during one of his trips, a Chaldean peasant guided him to a place with impressive rock reliefs, later known as Maltai reliefs deriving the modern name from the nearby Assyrian village of Maltai. In the village of Nerem, today's Gunduk, a third-millennium cave site was known to the contemporary Assyrian community living in the village as Guppa d'Mar Yohanan (Cave of St. John), where the community associated the reliefs with St. John and Christian rituals, thus continuing with the sacred nature of the ancient site. Assyrian communities across the world are connected through their language.

Assyrian language, also referred to as Neo-Aramaic/Neo-Syriac, with heavy Akkadian influence, is another thread through which the Assyrian community interacts with its ancient heritage. Akkadian and Aramaic were the official languages of the Neo-Assyrian Empire that flourished from 934 to approximately 600 BCE. The fact that the modern Assyrian language continued as a minority-spoken language based on a high percentage of Akkadian is an impressive index of in-group particularity. Assyrian writers, poets, linguists, and historians continue using and studying this language both inside and outside academia.

In addition, Assyrian Christianity exhibits ancient elements unique to this community and links to its ancient heritage, including the Rogation of the Ninevites, during which members of the community fast for three days commemorating the repentance of the Ninevites at the hands of the prophet Jonah according to the Bible. Another celebration is the day of Nusardel (Feast of God), usually celebrated in Tammuz (July). Following the holy mass, members of the community throw water at each other to cleanse God's path. This tradition most likely originates in the ancient Assyrian and Mesopotamian rituals, such as those of the New Year. These and other rituals have been celebrated in Assyrian villages and towns for centuries and everywhere they live today.

The engagement with ancient Assyrian/Mesopotamian heritage connects modern Assyrians to their landscape, villages, and towns and links them as a diaspora community worldwide. With their declining numbers in the homeland, ancient sites, monuments, and landscapes offer the community a sense of belonging, reaffirm their identity, and stand witness to their existence on this land throughout time. Therefore, communities worldwide organize trips to their homeland where young men and women connect with their ancestral homeland. One of the most popular Atra (homeland) tours is offered by Gishru (bridge), a nonprofit organization based in the United States. These tours include visits to ancient Assyrian sites in northern Iraq, ancestral villages, schools, and cultural institutions. Such activities connect young Assyrians in the diaspora with their fellow Assyrians at home and allow them to understand their identity.

Around the world, Assyrian artists have been experimenting and interacting with ancient Assyrian art and cultural elements. This awareness and engagement increased, especially after ISIS attacks on Assyrian cultural heritage in Iraq. To counterpart ISIS's attempt for ethnic and cultural cleansing of the Assyrians in the areas they controlled, Assyrian artists in the homeland and diaspora have been recreating lost material culture and pushing for the survival of this heritage through exhibitions, talks, and workshops, including artists such as Nenous Thabet (Iraq), Nahrin Malki (Netherlands), Ninos DeChammo (United States), Lweis Batros (Australia), whose statute of Gilgamesh stands tall at the University of Sydney, Camperdown. In addition, young Assyrian artists have taken their engagement with their ancient heritage even further by returning to their historic villages and towns and creating art inspired by the past of their communities; such examples may include artist Esther Elia who traveled thousands of miles to the village of Nala in northern Iraq to paint murals depicting Assyrian heritage.

Ancient Assyrian culture is not dead for modern Assyrians, contrasting Western scholars' and researchers' beliefs. Elements of the ancient culture continue today in the contemporary Assyrian homeland, including language, food, dress, music, art, etc. Likewise, such cultural components are visible where Assyrians live, learn, and gather worldwide and in the homeland. Opening our minds to consider this connection and continuity and the meaning of this engagement beyond the typical colonial and nationalist stereotypes will broaden our understanding of the region today and allow us to expand our academic studies of the people and their cultures both in the past and present and for the future as we continue with our scientific progress.

Further reading:

- Sargon Donabed 2015. *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the Twentieth Century*.
- Hannibal Travis 2017. *The Assyrian Genocide: Cultural and Political Legacies*.
- Alda Benjamin 2022. *Assyrians in Modern Iraq: Negotiating Political and Cultural Space*.
- Onver A. Cetrez et al. 2012. *Assyrian Heritage: Threads of Continuity and Influence*.
- Amy Gansell and Ann Shafer 2020. *Testing the Canon of Ancient Near Eastern Art and Archaeology*.



Field trip to Khinnis, an Assyrian archaeological site in Duhok Province. Photo: Gishru.

The graphic consists of a light grey background on the left and a photograph of two young women on the right. The women are sitting outdoors near a body of water, with hills in the background. One woman is wearing a white t-shirt with the Gishru logo. Overlaid on the image is the name 'Melinda Khubiar' and a quote: "I finally understood where I came from and all the stories clicked in my mind from childhood." Below the quote is another line: "My identity made sense to me."

Members of the Assyrian American community in northern Iraq. Photo: Gishru.



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