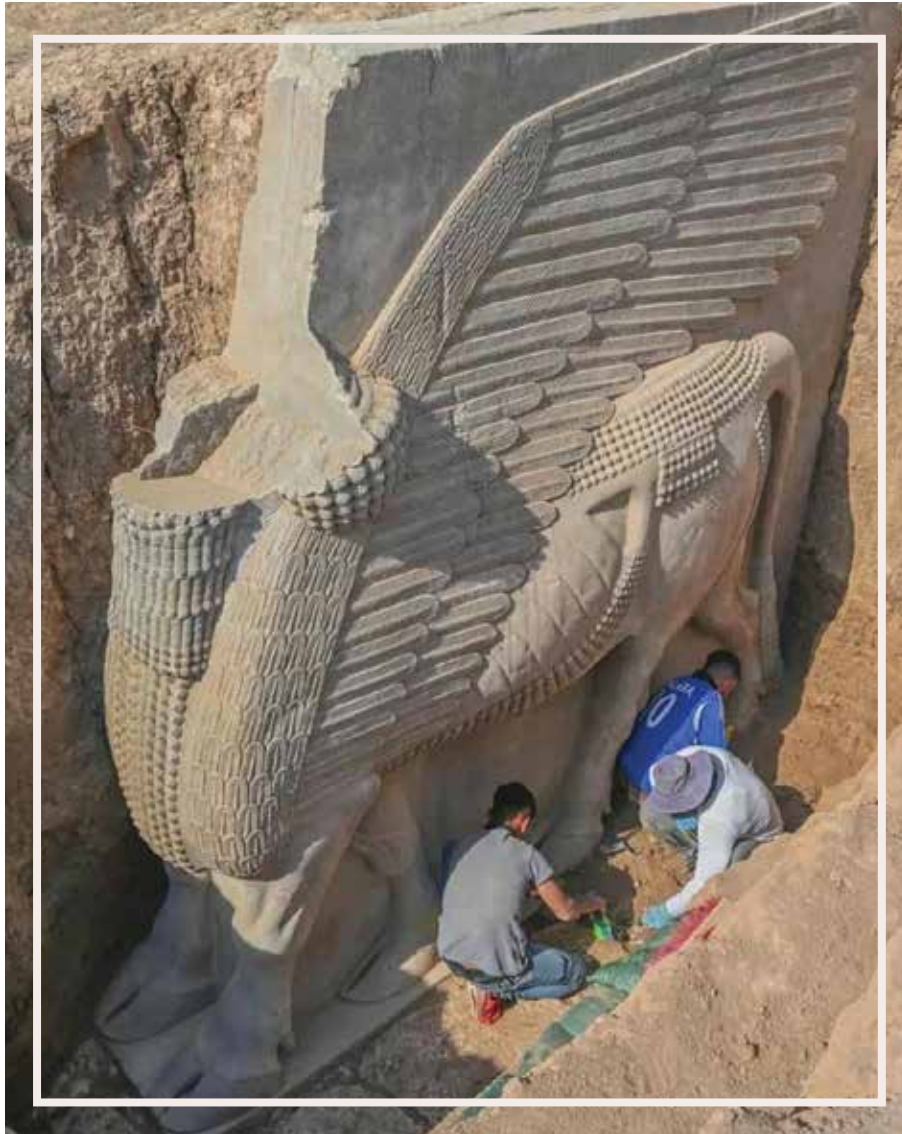




# NINEVEH

CULTURAL | EDUCATIONAL | SOCIAL



A massive sculpture of a lamassu, a deity with a human head and a winged bull's body, was recently unearthed at the Neo-Assyrian (ca. 883-609 B.C.) capital of Dur-Sharrukin, in northern Iraq. The statue was partially excavated in the 1990s and later reburied to safeguard it from harm. The head of the lamassu statue was missing, but the figure was otherwise in exceptional condition.

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## Message from the President *A Tribute to My Dear Friend*

Growing up in San Francisco, a city filled with diversity, was both enriching and challenging. Being surrounded by people whose values, traditions, and ways of communicating differ from your own allows an individual to learn and grow, but it also requires constant adjustment to fit in. In those moments, belonging to a community that shares your heritage, culture, language, and values becomes a source of comfort and grounding. Although the Assyrian community was small, we were grateful for our Assyrian Church, Mar Narsai Parish, and the Assyrian



Foundation of

America, which held our community together like an extended family, providing a place to connect, celebrate our culture, and feel at home among people who truly understand us. It was this sense of shared heritage and community that made one of my brightest college memories at San Francisco State University: meeting my dear friend Mary during our first year. At that time, there were only a handful of Assyrians on campus, and finding each other felt like discovering a familiar face in a sea of strangers.

Mary and I bonded immediately over our shared heritage. It wasn't just about speaking the same language, but about understanding the values we carried from home: respect for our families, pride in our history, and a deep sense of responsibility to carry forward our culture. Those conversations, the laughter over familiar expressions, and the comfort of someone who simply understood where I came from laid the foundation for a lifelong friendship.

Mary went on to become an accomplished medical doctor. For over two decades, she cared for her patients at Kaiser Oakland with warmth, patience, and unwavering commitment. She treated everyone who came through her doors with dignity and respect, leaving a lasting impact on colleagues, patients, and the entire medical community.

Dr. Mary Hermes lost her battle with cancer last June, and saying goodbye to someone who had such a profound presence in my life has not been easy. Yet it is a privilege to celebrate her remarkable life. Mary was more than a brilliant physician, she was a beacon of kindness, integrity, and compassion for everyone who had the honor of knowing her. Her life was a testament to honoring our heritage while making a meaningful impact on the wider world. For me personally, she will always remain a cherished friend, a sister in culture, and a reminder of the power of shared roots, values, and friendship.

*I dedicate this article to my dear friend, Dr. Mary Hermes, whose friendship, kindness, and legacy continue to inspire me.*

**Jackline Yelda**  
President, Assyrian Foundation of America

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Articles submitted for publication will be selected by the editorial staff on the basis of their relative merit to Assyrian literature, history, and current events.

Opinions expressed in NINEVEH are those of the respective authors and not necessarily those of NINEVEH or the Assyrian Foundation of America.

Assyrian Foundation of America established in June 1964 and incorporated in the state of California is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to the advancement of the education of Assyrians.

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Yearly subscription fees  
US ..... \$40  
International..... \$60

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December 2025

As we enter this blessed Christmas season, we are reminded of the importance of hope, generosity, and community. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for your continued support of the Assyrian Foundation of America. Thanks to your generosity, we have directed over \$100,000 this year toward initiatives supporting education, culture, and community, including:

- **26 scholarships totaling \$50,000**, supporting students from Armenia, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria in fields ranging from Medicine, Law, Finance, and Engineering to Culinary Arts, Psychology, Pedagogy, and Assyrian Studies.
- **Rehabilitation of the Ashurbanipal Library in Bakhdida, Nineveh**, through a grant to the Etuti Institute.
- **Archiving, digitizing, translating, and publishing historical letters from Urmia (1900-1917)** that document the lived experiences of the Assyrian community during that era.
- **Support for an Assyrian filmmaker** producing a documentary that highlights a rock-climbing journey across the Assyrian homeland.
- **Publication support for an author through the Popular Book Award**, helping elevate modern Assyrian storytelling.
- **Travel support for scholars from Iraq** to present important work at international academic conferences.
- **Support for the Assyrian Studies Association**, which successfully hosted its second biennial symposium this October in Arizona.
- **Goat Project in Nahla Village**, through a grant to the Shlama Foundation, providing goats, training, and resources to help Assyrian families build sustainable dairy microbusinesses.
- **Uniforms for a girls' soccer team in Syria**, through a grant to the Shlama Foundation.
- **Financial support for a local surgery in Armenia**, through a grant to Assyrians for Education.
- **Continued publication of *Nineveh Magazine***, a global voice preserving and sharing Assyrian history, culture, and community stories

Looking ahead to 2026, we are excited to commit to several meaningful projects:

- **Professional orchestral recording of *Treasures of Assyrian Song***, led by Honiball Joseph and the Gilgamesh Arts & Culture Foundation, to be released on major platforms.
- **Reprint of a rare 1300s book, *Paradise of Eden***, by Mar Odisho bar Brikha, with a new forward and introduction by Tomas Isik.
- **Continued support for the Assyrian Studies Association**, advancing research, publications, collaborative projects, and global scholarly engagement.

As one of the oldest Assyrian nonprofit organizations, we are dedicated to preserving our language, culture, and heritage through educational, humanitarian, and cultural programs. None of this would be possible without the support of our cherished members and friends. As we close out the year, we humbly ask for your continued support—every gift, no matter the size, helps sustain and expand our programs, strengthen our community, and honor our heritage both near and far.

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!  
Wishing you peace, joy, and prosperity this blessed season, and  
continued strength for our beloved Assyrian nation around the world.*

You may donate online at [www.assyrianfoundation.org](http://www.assyrianfoundation.org) or use the enclosed envelope.

# Interpreters by Day, Targets by Night: The Forgotten Story of Assyrian Translators in the Iraq Wars

Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.

## A Voice in the Crossfire

We're in Baghdad. The year is 2004. A young Assyrian named Daniel\* climbed into the back of a U.S. Humvee. His flak jacket hung loose, his helmet wobbled on his head. Unlike the soldiers he accompanied, his job wasn't to pull a trigger, it was to translate with precision. Daniel spoke Arabic and English with ease. At home, he spoke and prayed in Assyrian (what linguists call Neo-Aramaic), the language of his ancestors. In tense encounters between American troops and Iraqi civilians, he was the bridge. A mistranslation could spark chaos. A clear sentence could save lives. But outside the wire, his voice made him a target. Militias delivered threats to his family's doorstep. His cousin was kidnapped. For Assyrian translators like Daniel, every patrol was a gamble — not just for the soldiers he served, but for his own survival.

(\*Name changed for safety.)

## The Wars That Changed Iraq

For many younger readers, the Iraq wars are distant headlines. However, they reshaped the Middle East, and Assyrians were caught in the midst of the desert storms.

The First Gulf War (1990–1991) began when Saddam Hussein's Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait. A U.S.-led coalition, backed by the United Nations, responded with a massive air and ground campaign. Though the war was short, the aftermath left Iraq under crippling sanctions throughout the 1990s. For ordinary Iraqis (including Assyrians) daily life meant shortages of

food, medicine, and opportunity.

The Second Gulf War (2003–2011), often called the Iraq War, was far bloodier. The U.S. and its allies invaded Iraq in March 2003, citing weapons of mass destruction (later proven to be false intelligence) and Saddam Hussein's rule as threats. Within weeks, Saddam's government fell, but what followed was years of insurgency, sectarian violence, and foreign occupation. Cities like Baghdad and Mosul, once home to thriving Assyrian neighborhoods, became battlegrounds.

For coalition forces, one challenge was immediate and constant: language. Soldiers couldn't navigate local dialects, negotiate with tribal leaders, or gather intelligence without interpreters. For Assyrians, with their multilingual heritage and unique position in Iraq's social fabric, that challenge became both an opportunity and a deadly risk.

## Why Assyrians?

When U.S. and coalition forces invaded Iraq in 2003, they relied on thousands of Iraqi interpreters. Among them, Assyrians stood out. Many Assyrians were multilingual, speaking Assyrian at home, Arabic in public, and English from schools or relatives in the diaspora. Moreover, Christians were often viewed by American officers as "less entangled" in Sunni–Shia rivalries. Finally, many Assyrian families in Chicago, Detroit, San Jose, and Turlock sent bilingual volunteers back as contractors or soldiers, filling a desperate need.

The U.S. Army's Iraqi Linguist Program, run by

Titan Corporation (later L-3), recruited thousands. For commanders, interpreters weren't optional — they were lifelines. "They became our ears and tongues," one officer said of Iraqi linguists.

## How Many Served?

There is no official public breakdown by ethnicity, but we can anchor a conservative estimate using credible figures. At the 2008 peak, L-3/Titan alone had "almost 7,000" translators in Iraq; other contracts and direct hires push the theater total higher. Reporting during and after the war consistently notes that minorities — especially Kurds and Iraqi Christians (Chaldo-Assyrians/Syriacs) — were overrepresented among interpreters relative to their share of Iraq's population. Before 2003, Christians made up roughly 3–6% of Iraq's population.

If Christians accounted for even 10–20% of local interpreters (a cautious range given the overrepresentation noted above), then in the peak year alone that implies roughly 700–1,400 Christian interpreters working with U.S. forces in Iraq. Because most Iraqi Christians belong to the Assyrian (including Chaldeans and Syriacs) community, a substantial share of that number would have been Assyrian by heritage/identity. For scale, at least 360 interpreters employed by Titan/L-3 were killed (2003–2008), with more than 1,200 injured, a toll higher than any coalition partner except the U.S. itself.

## The Cost of Speaking Out

The pay was good, approximately six times the salary of an Iraqi school teacher, but the risks were brutal. Human Rights Watch documented how interpreters were branded "traitors" and assassinated. Militias followed them home, bombed their cars, or targeted their families.

Many lived in hiding, moving house to house, disguising their voices in public.

For Assyrians, the danger was doubled. Not only were they hunted as collaborators, they were also marked as Christians in a country growing more sectarian by the day. Entire neighborhoods of Baghdad's Assyrian community emptied out, families fleeing to Syria and Jordan with little more than their passports.

## The Allies America Left Behind

Kirk Johnson, a former U.S. aid worker in Iraq, later described the interpreters as "the Iraqis America left behind." His book, *To Be a Friend Is Fatal* (2013), documents how many of these men and women, including Assyrians, waited years for promised U.S. Special Immigrant Visas, stuck in limbo even as death threats piled up.

Some eventually resettled in America, joining existing Assyrian communities in Chicago, Detroit, Phoenix, Los Angeles, and Turlock, while others were less fortunate. Their stories remain scattered, remembered only in family circles and diaspora churches.

## Echoes in History

The Assyrian translators of the Iraq wars were not the first to stand at the crossroads of empires. Their role as cultural intermediaries reaches deep into history, stretching back centuries before the U.S. Army ever entered Baghdad.

In the 13th century, Assyrian Christians, members of the Church of the East, served as scribes, physicians, and translators in the Mongol courts of Genghis Khan and his successors. Figures like Simeon Rabban Ata, a Syriac monk recognized by Mongol rulers as an overseer of Christian

For commanders, interpreters weren't optional — they were lifelines. "They became our ears and tongues," one officer said of Iraqi linguists.

affairs, traveled widely across Asia and mediated between Eastern and Western churches. These Assyrian scholars were fluent in Syriac, Persian, Turkic, and Mongol, making them invaluable at a time when the Mongol Empire stretched from China to Europe.

Their influence reached as far as the Tang dynasty in China, where the Xi'an Stele (781 A.D.) records how East Syriac Christians brought both religious and scholarly texts to the imperial court. In Baghdad during the Islamic Golden Age, Syriac-speaking Christians like Hunayn ibn Ishaq (809–873 A.D.) preserved Aristotle, Galen, and Hippocrates for the medieval world by translating them into Arabic.

Across the centuries, Assyrians were often caught in the same paradox their descendants faced in Iraq: they were indispensable as interpreters and mediators, yet vulnerable as minorities within larger powers. In the Mongol courts, their favor with one khan could mean persecution under the next. In Iraq, their service to the U.S. military made them both highly valued and highly targeted.

This continuity gives the modern story of Assyrian translators in the Iraq wars a haunting resonance. Just as their ancestors once gave voice to dialogue between Mongols, Persians, and Europeans, Assyrian interpreters in Baghdad gave voice to conversations between Americans and Iraqis. Both groups carried the same burden: to bridge worlds that would otherwise collide.

### Forgotten by Many but Not by Us

Today, the wars in Iraq have faded into memory for many. But for Assyrians, the legacy remains raw. Families were uprooted, communities scattered, and the very act of translation, bridging two worlds, became a matter of life and death.

The Assyrian translators of Iraq's wars were not just auxiliaries. They were cultural ambassadors, living shields, and, too often, forgotten casualties. Their sacrifice deserves to be remembered, not only as a chapter in Assyrian history, but as a reminder of the cost of war borne by those who lend their voices.

# ELECTRIFY ASSYRIA

A new nonprofit is stepping up to keep Assyrian villages alive and thriving.



## Powering Peace In Assyria: Solar & Battery Will Bring Life Back to Assyrian Communities In Iraq.

By Anthony Dawood

To understand the story and mission, it's important to look at the ingredients gathered over 25 years that ultimately came together to form The Shimsha Project.

The story begins in 1999. Boarding flights was easy, and the world was on edge to see if computers could take the shift from the 20th century to the 21st.

That December, only 29 days away from being a true "millennial baby," I was brought into this world by two loving parents making a life for themselves far from the places they were born. My mother was born and raised Ashitnetha in Kirkuk, Iraq, while my father was born and raised Zakhonaya in Baghdad. I was, unbeknownst to me at the time,

yet another Assyrian born into the diaspora, bound for a childhood and adolescence of questions, discovery, pride, community, and many hours spent around a packed kitchen table trying to decipher the stories told in the language they were lived out in.

Little did I know, I wasn't alone. Although it wasn't in hotspots like Chicago, Sweden, Australia, or Phoenix, I was within a six-hour drive up the heart of California to one of the richest Assyrian communities in the U.S. I was born in Orange County, California, but my beautiful mother's six siblings, her cousin, her mother, and her 14 nephews and nieces lived in Turlock and Modesto, CA. I spent summers there surrounded by people who "got it." Fourteen cousins who were having many of the same experiences I was — navigating life as children of a nation that "doesn't exist anymore," in a nation that generations before me were highly incentivized to come to, considering all that was going on in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey in the second half of the 20th century. It was so nice to share time with my cousins growing up; there was a mutual understanding you couldn't find elsewhere.

But as God would have it, I did not grow up near this beloved family of mine.

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I grew up in beautiful South Orange County, California, which is known for its beaches, surfers, and... virtually no Assyrians. And so, the “whitewashing” began. I was separated from the language, separated from the church, from the culture, the weddings and events, the second cousins’ births — seemingly everything. While my cousins were going on dates with Ashorinas, I was going on dates with Sabrinias. This produced two radically different perspectives, experiences, and memories for me throughout the years. It felt like a sort of double life. But through it all, I never stopped revering my close cousins, aunts, and uncles. I wanted to be just like them. I wanted to fit into my culture. After all, I was the youngest of the 14 cousins, which meant I got really good at taking a joke.

However, my insecurities around my ability to speak the language, my ability to grow a beard, and how much time I spent around Qashas never subsided. I only saw the ways I wasn’t fitting in. Everything seemed different for me, and I constantly yearned to feel a part of my Assyrian culture.

### **Ingredient #1 — Isolation from the culture I fell in love with.**

As I navigated my early life, I was constantly looking for ways to fit into my surroundings. I remember thinking to myself, “I look like everyone else...? It doesn’t seem like everyone goes home to smell the scent of riza’o shorba on a Tuesday afternoon.” It didn’t make much sense. The classic “Where are you from? / What are you?” asked by peers or parents never came with an easy or short answer. “Well, my parents were born in Iraq, but we’re Christians.” “Yes, we’re Assyrians, you know, speak the same language Jesus spoke.” “No, no, that’s Syrians. We’re Uh-syrians!” “Yes, I’m Uh-serious.”

It wasn’t my favorite conversation to be a part of, and honestly, it wasn’t until my early to mid-twenties that I really stepped into and embraced who I am as an Assyrian-American



My father’s parents at community festivities back home, the kinds of memories shared around warm meals with family growing up.

. The impetus behind this newfound pride in who I was? Education. As you grow up, you hear the stories. They’re everywhere, and they’re not that cool. Oh, that’s just \_\_\_\_\_ going on about \_\_\_\_\_.” Fill in the blanks with the family member and their classic story. What I’ve come to realize is that, as we — the new generation — age, the stories themselves don’t stop; we just stop asking. We naturally lose our curiosity as we age around the same people. While I definitely took my break as a “too cool” teenager, I have always been fascinated by the stories of us Assyrians that we virtually all share, told by the people closest to me.

### **Ingredient #2 — Pride from the education about our people & who we are.**

Years went on. I flourished in school, moved away to college, built lasting friendships, continued to discover more about my identity, and traveled as much as I could, always fueled by the encouragement of my amazing father. It was during one of these extended stays, working as an English teaching assistant in Spain, that I got the chance to go to a place I never thought possible. Up to that point, I had been all over Europe for months: most of the major cities in countries everyone has on their bucket list, seeing sites and absorbing the history of a continent so rich in it. All by the age of 23 — it was a huge privilege.

As I met up with a couple cousins in Paris, they shared their plans and invited me to join them in Iraq a couple weeks out. I couldn’t wait to call my dad and bounce the idea off him. His words switched from the always classic “Over my dead body” to “This is your chance, go for it.” So I went: eight days with three cousins, my aunt, and uncle. All throughout the cities and scenes of Northern Iraq that I hadn’t seen — only heard of in those kitchen-table rides down memory lane around a platter of seeds and dried fruit. Sersink, Nahla, Semele, Alqosh, Rabban Hormizd, Zakho, Bekhatmy. It was truly life-changing. It was all starting to make a bit more sense. All the differences I’d notice with my family and the families of my American friends all had an origin.



A highlight from my trip to Attra, Gishra’d Dalaleh

“Ohh, so this is why we \_\_\_\_\_.” However, my biggest, most profound takeaway: We’re still here. What an amazing revelation it was. Not ever having any close family there to describe the current state of our land, being a teenager through the year of ISIS and seeing all that destruction through a tiny lens — it seemed impossible that we remained when all the dust of persecution settled.

And yet, there we were. However, to say we are thriving as much as we could be in the region would be an exaggeration. The harsh living conditions of our people, mostly neglected by the KRG and Iraqi government, were glaringly obvious. My thought: This is amazing and all, but this can’t be sustainable.

### **Ingredient #3 — First-hand experience of the harsh realities of “Back Home.”**

I returned home with newfound perspective on my identity, an even deeper sense of Assyrian pride, and a need for a real career at home. So I moved from California to Dallas, Texas, in the fall of 2023. There, I began working for a company that sold solar panel systems to homeowners all throughout the Dallas–Fort Worth area. It was wildly transformative for my self-confidence, my ability to communicate, but most of all, my ability to listen. There is not one person on Earth who will sign up for a \$50,000 loan for solar panels with a stranger in a polo at their kitchen table if they do not feel heard. I was learning about myself constantly, but not much about the industry. I moved on to another company in solar, where I was tasked with selling a different solar system financing product — this time, door-to-door. One hundred percent commission: you eat what you kill.

What an experience. I was forced to learn more about the process behind the scenes so I could be more confident in my pitch, since that is everything on the doors. I had begun having some real success, but as my product was experienced by more and more homeowners, I was quickly losing faith in the product of solar panels themselves. I lost my edge and did not believe in the product any longer, meaning time was definitely up on the doors. I then pivoted to a career with a manufacturer in the industry: a battery manufacturer for homes with solar panels. Same industry, ten times more knowledge. I have learned more in the short time I have been with EG4 Electronics than my entire time selling on doors and at kitchen tables. EG4 Electronics, one of the fastest growing battery manufacturers in the space, began its growth in the off-grid market.

This is an entire market of Americans who live completely energy independent: no electrical grid powering their home, no meter on their outdoor wall, just sun, solar panels, and a couple batteries that result in a fully powered home. This population is much larger than the average person is aware of. These folks are also not all millionaires; they're average people likely in rural places in America. Therefore, this equipment must be cost-effective. Further, this energy independence demands quality products, since there is no Plan B for your lights to come on. Can you see where this is going?

**And just like that, we have Ingredient #4 — Access and knowledge of impactful products.**

So time went on: training after training, sales call after sales call. By this point, I had become a product-knowledge expert in one of the only sectors of the energy space that intersects with the average person living under our sun, who needs access to electricity. If you can't imagine it, that's most of the developed world and especially the undeveloped populations on Earth. In fact, I had some colleagues who were involved in projects in Africa building clean energy water wells and powering schools and churches. It was always such a beautiful use of the gift we have in our access to EG4 Electronics' equipment. Then one day, I was on LinkedIn and noticed a post about solar and battery equipment being donated to a village in Iraq. And that was the beginning of it all. My mind began to race: "Who's to say I'm not able to do this, with my people?" I began researching, drawing, collecting information, and most importantly, taking action. I reached out to a renowned Assyrian foundation I had come across all over social media, the Shlama Foundation. I was able to get a hold of them and confirm if what I was planning was 1) necessary and 2) desired. The answer from board member Noor was a resounding yes. He also began to tell me about the real electrical realities of our people back home. The average household village income being \$500-\$600, and the average cost for electricity (government plus generator fuel) being \$150 a month. A fourth of their hard-earned dollar going to electricity that yielded 5-7 hours of grid power, with the rest from loud, unhealthy generators.

It's chaos. And that is under normal weather conditions. In the desert heat, the grid is less reliable and energy is more expensive. In the mountainous cold, there is nothing but absolutely toxic kerosene oil heaters in classrooms for warmth. It was absolutely jarring to learn about. There was no stopping me then. The Shimsha Project was born.

**Ingredient #5 — Inspiration to make an impact on my people.**

Today, The Shimsha Project is a registered 501(c)(3) aimed at bringing electricity to Assyrian villages in the homeland. The support we have garnered just in these early stages has been tremendous. I was able to secure a booth at this year's Assyrian Convention and spread the message the old-fashioned way, word of mouth. The connections made and stories heard from the first hand accounts of people my age who have been back to Attra were amazing. It is fuel for The Shimsha Project.



The Shimsha Project Booth at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Assyrian Convention in Anaheim, CA. Accompanied by my mother, one of the first board members we brought on the team.

Our mission is very simple: **Power, Retain, Grow.**

We will **POWER** the lives of our Assyrian relatives in the homeland, subsequently increasing their quality of life. As we know from any civilization anywhere, when quality of life increases, so does population. A side benefit we hope to achieve with Shimsha will be the increase in career experience of everyone from engineers to the installation techs who work with us.

Thus, when we conclude, there will not be a vacuum but rather a stimulated industry in our economy. By ways like these, we will **RETAIN** our presence at home and finally **GROW** our impact in our home region.



The Shimsha Project logo that tells the entire story. On the top half, we see a classic symbol for us, the Star of Shamash that represents the ancient Assyrian sun god. On the bottom half, we see a lightning bolt representing electricity. All is being encapsulated in the silhouette of a battery.

The Project is divided into 3 Phases.

**Phase 1 — The Cooling Phase**

I have access to hybrid AC/DC mini-split air conditioning/heat pump units that operate off nothing but sunlight during the day. These are perfect for public spaces open during the day, such as schools, cafes, churches, hospitals, businesses, daycares, and much more. At night, they will run off whatever is powering the area. This allows for cost-effective, reliable, sustainable temperature control for the most basic life functions. We hope to impact the small villages where access to a first-world luxury, "24-hour electricity," is still a far-fetched hope. The list of villages will be posted to our website as soon as locations are finalized. Today, we are in the fund accumulation process of Phase 1. Partners on the ground will be compensated to help with reception of equipment through customs, installation, and maintenance.

**Phase 2 — Power Phase 1**

Phases 2 and 3 will be the phases that involve batteries. The batteries I plan to deploy are 48-Volt, Lithium Iron Phosphate (LFP) batteries that can be charged by solar panels directly.

These batteries have an operating temperature of -5°F to 120°F. Their lifespan is 8,000 deep cycles (meaning if you drain the battery to the recommended 20% daily, you should expect normal function for 21.9 years). These batteries will allow for energy self-reliance of the Assyrians of Northern Iraq. They can make use and discharge of it as they wish. I plan to target the most important public spaces in small villages around the area. Exact locations are not yet confirmed but will **ALWAYS** be made public on our social media.

**Phase 3 — Power Phase 2**

Phase 3 will be the complete powering of homes in Assyrian villages. These homes will be outfitted with custom amounts of solar panels and batteries to match the consumption of each home. This will ensure proper utilization of resources and optimal efficacy of the systems we are donating. We will move from village to village, growing in size as we go, taking entire villages "off-grid" in a sort of community solar configuration. My dream is to have tens of Assyrian villages completely energy independent in the homeland.

We are in the fund accumulation process and will begin gathering materials and planning the logistics of the first pilot AC/DC mini-split systems.

If it is on your heart to donate to support The Shimsha Project, do not hesitate to go to our website, [shimshaproject.org](http://shimshaproject.org), to learn more. Click the button "Tap to Send Light" to be taken to the donation page. Please follow us on Instagram (@theshimshaproject) and Facebook (The Shimsha Project) for updates along our journey. All questions or requests to join the Team, please send to [hello@shimshaproject.org](mailto:hello@shimshaproject.org).

**We are Powering Peace in Assyria. We are The Shimsha Project.**

Baseema Raba & God Bless You,

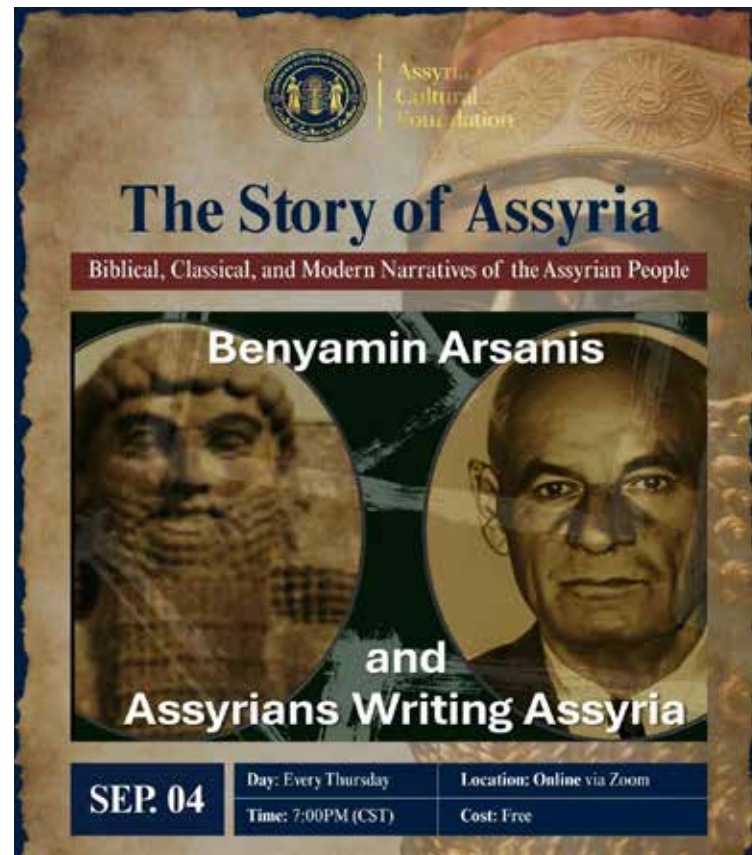
*Anthony Danood*



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## Rabi Benyamin Arsanis

The Ashurbanipal Library of the Assyrian Cultural Foundation currently presents a weekly Zoom class on the historiography of the Assyrians titled “The Story of Assyria: Biblical, Classical, and Modern Narratives of the Assyrian People.”

The class is taught by Robert DeKelaita, with assistance from Sarah Gawo and Pierre Younan. So far, we have discussed the importance of critically assessing history and how that relates to the Assyrians. We have examined what the Bible says about the Assyrians, the Greek and Roman views of Assyria, as well as Assyria in the minds of Westerners and modern Western historians, among other topics.

For the purpose of this article, I would like to focus on class #11, which took place on September 4, about Benyamin Arsanis and Assyrians writing about Assyria in the early 20th century.

### Urmia as Context

Before turning directly to Arsanis and his life, it is important to first consider Urmia, Iran. Urmia represented a significant center of the Assyrian population and was often described as a paradise. Early

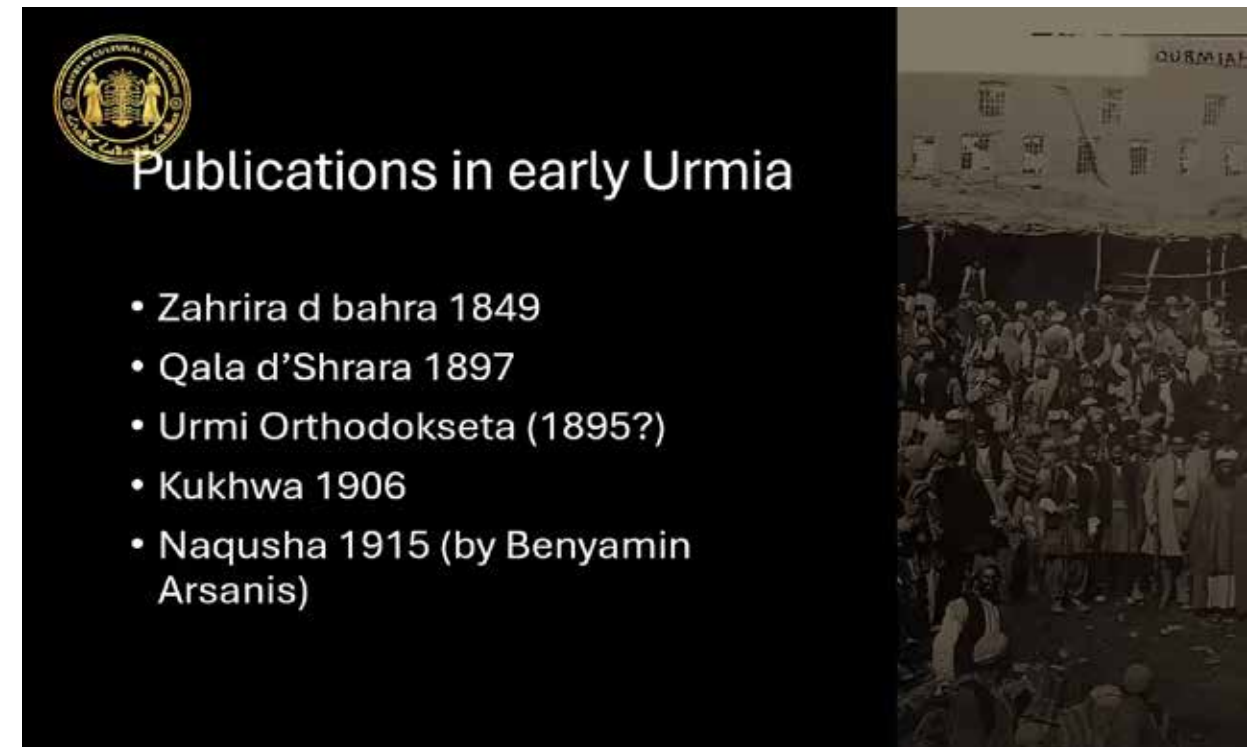
20th-century Urmia produced a remarkable number of publications, including Naqusha in 1917 by Benyamin Arsanis, which contributed to the city becoming a literary hub.

Although Urmia experienced a literary boom, it also faced fragmentation as Assyrians broke away from the Assyrian Church of the East into various branches of Christianity. For example, the Assyrian Council (1906–1907) was the first joint council of Assyrians in Urmia; however, internal conflicts between church groups caused its collapse. This sparked a larger question in the minds of many Assyrians: Who are we?

### The Life of Benyamin Arsanis

It is in this context that Benyamin Arsanis emerges. Though highly critical of the Assyrian people, he had a vision and pursued it.

One of the few books about Arsanis was compiled by Youel Baaba, who was involved in printing many works, including Gilgamesh magazine in the 1950s. Arsanis was born in Digala, Urmia, in 1884. He studied at the Orthodox Mission in Urmia, then left for Russia in 1907 to study ancient world history in Saint Petersburg. He



returned to Urmia, where he taught at the Orthodox school and became a representative of the Russian Mission. He remained there until 1918, during the Assyrian Genocide (Baaba, 12).

After 1918, he lived in Iraq and taught at the school of Rev. Yousip Qaletta in Mosul, later returning to Iran, where he lived in Tehran until his death in 1957. Throughout his life, Arsanis emphasized the need for an Assyrian press independent of missionary influence. He founded Dasta d Saprayoota Sooryeta (Assyrian Literary Group/Committee) to encourage a love of literature among Assyrians (Baaba, 13). He also served as editor of Khoshawa d Dankha in Urmia, and of Shotaputa Umtanayta d Aturayeh (Assyrian National Association) in 1913. Baaba describes Arsanis as a gifted orator who inspired many Assyrians.

Arsanis was married to Katrina, who later became active in Assyrian charity work in Tehran. They had two sons, Gewargis and Marona, and one daughter, Sima. In 1935, he sent Gewargis and Marona to Russia for higher education. Gewargis went on to teach Persian at the University of Moscow for 35 years, while Marona became a teacher and Persian-language radio broadcaster in Moscow (Baaba, 12–13).

### Theoretical Framework

Before diving further into Arsanis’s writings, it is helpful

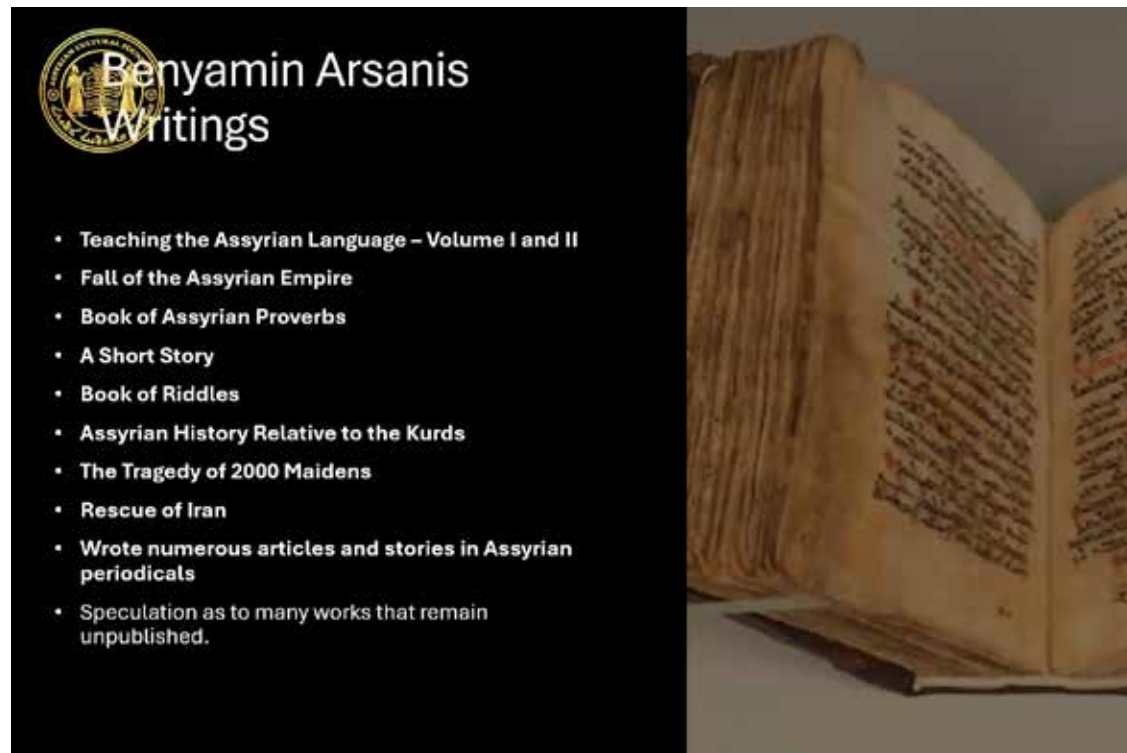
to understand the theoretical framework of his thought. Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities provides an interpretive lens through which to view his work.

Where does Arsanis fall within the stages of Assyrianism? Robert DeKelaita identifies three major periods:

1. 1890-1914: Intellectuals and professionals.
2. 1915-1933: Patriarchs and Maliks leading the movement.
3. 1934-1990: The “end” of the Assyrian question and the Assyrian diaspora.

Arsanis belongs to the first period, marked by literary achievements such as his creation of the Society of Assyrian Literary Culture in 1912, which promoted “enthusiasm for the nation and the expansion of authorship in the spoken language” (Becker, 332). This period emphasized secularism, the study and standardization of the Assyrian language, the rejection of denominationalism, and the reclamation of a lost past and identity. Arsanis embodied these ideals. He criticized foreign interference and sectarianism while promoting national identity and unity.

In 1917, Arsanis joined Dr. Freyduun Bet-Awraham (Aturaya) and Dr. Baba Parhad to establish the Assyrian Socialist Party. This party promoted a vision of Assyrian unity that inspired Aturaya’s “Urmia Manifesto



**Benyamin Arsanis Writings**

- Teaching the Assyrian Language – Volume I and II
- Fall of the Assyrian Empire
- Book of Assyrian Proverbs
- A Short Story
- Book of Riddles
- Assyrian History Relative to the Kurds
- The Tragedy of 2000 Maidens
- Rescue of Iran
- Wrote numerous articles and stories in Assyrian periodicals
- Speculation as to many works that remain unpublished.

of United Free Assyria.” The manifesto sought to consolidate the fragmented Assyrian nation into one entity with Russia as a hoped for savior.

That same year, Arsanis published an article in Kukhwa magazine titled “We are Assyrians, Not Syriac or Chaldeans!” where he distinguished between ethnicity and religion.

### Writings and Legacy

In his writings, Arsanis was often critical and issued strong calls to action. He insisted that the Assyrian nation had fallen into ignorance and that Assyrians must take charge of their own intellectual and cultural growth. He frequently addressed young Assyrians, which led him to create Malpuna Aturaya that was designed to teach continuity in history by utilizing Assyrian themes.

He also introduced Assyrians to aspects of their history that many had never encountered before. He wrote about the greatness of the Library of Ashurbanipal and about Sir Austen Henry Layard, the Assyriologist who discovered it in the ruins of Nineveh in 1843.

As Arsanis wrote:  
 “History is the light of life and would show the Assyrians of today who their ancestors were, from where they came, and where they are going. We are hopeful that

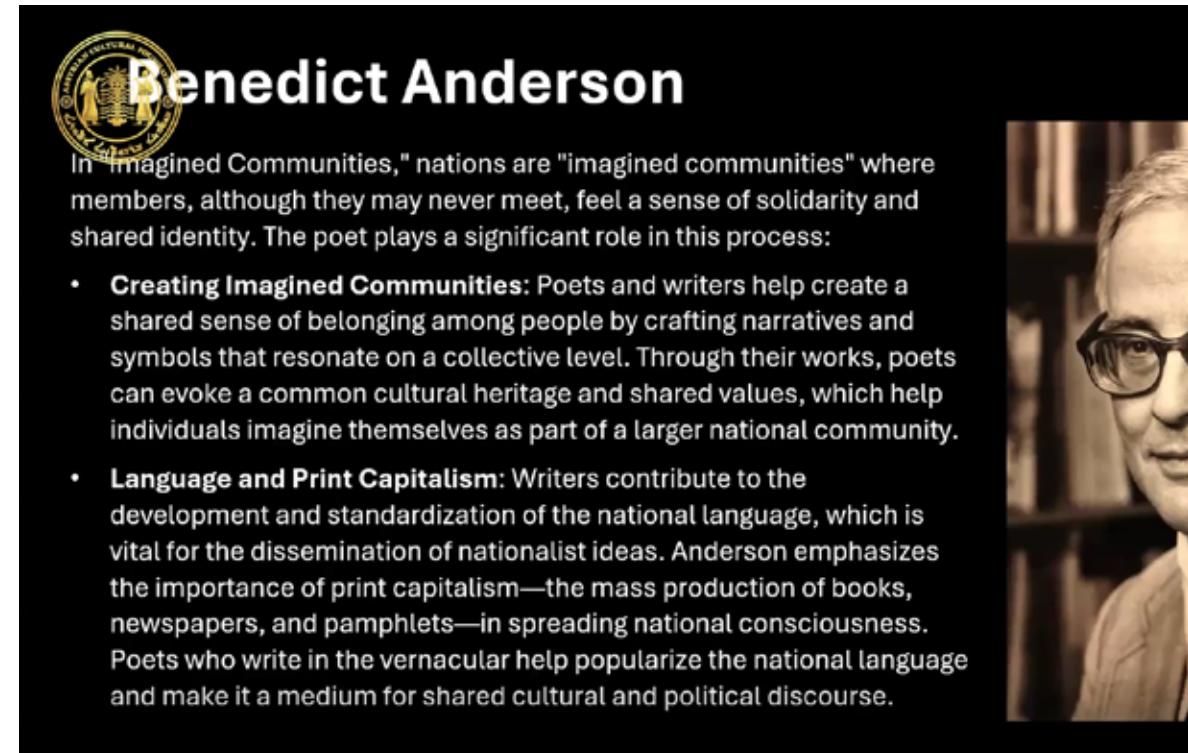
in reading this short history of the fall of the Assyrian kingdom, Assyrians would awake from their sleep.”

Here was a man who Assyrianized history, emphasized continuity, and stressed the importance of knowing one’s language, culture, and history. He was an activist, and most importantly, an Assyrianist.

According to Youel Baaba:  
 “He passed away as a poor man but with a treasury of writing that will remain in the memory of those who have a love for their language, literature, and feelings for their Assyrian existence... He always preached national unity, renewal, and resurrection” (Baaba, 13).

For more information about Benyamin Arsanis, I strongly encourage you to read Youel Baaba’s biography of him, as well as watch our lecture recording on Arsanis’s life and legacy which will soon be available on the Assyrian Cultural Foundation’s YouTube channel.

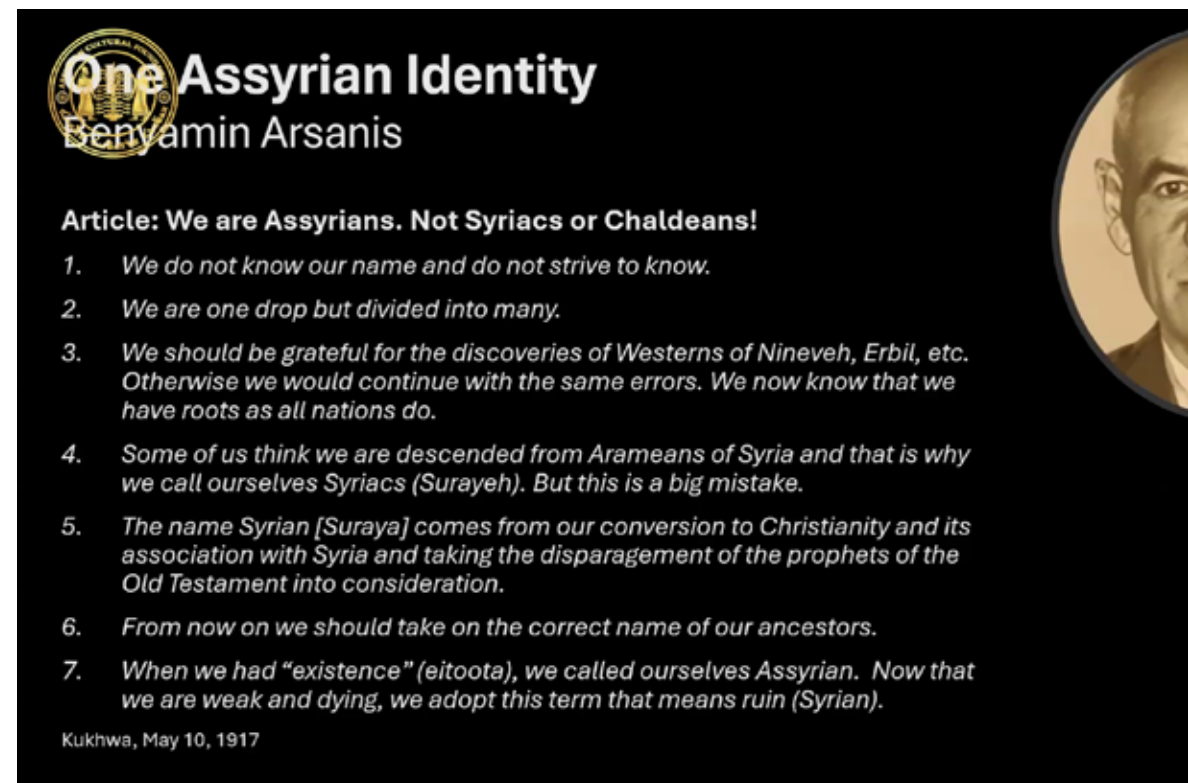
You can visit the Ashurbanipal Library’s catalog to explore all the books it holds by Benyamin Arsanis. Many of these records include a link to digitized versions of his works that were uploaded by the Ashurbanipal Library to the Internet Archive. The catalog can be accessed through the Assyrian Cultural Foundation website. Once there, search for “Ārsānis, Benyāmen” to view all of the library’s holdings.



**Benedict Anderson**

In “Imagined Communities,” nations are “imagined communities” where members, although they may never meet, feel a sense of solidarity and shared identity. The poet plays a significant role in this process:

- **Creating Imagined Communities:** Poets and writers help create a shared sense of belonging among people by crafting narratives and symbols that resonate on a collective level. Through their works, poets can evoke a common cultural heritage and shared values, which help individuals imagine themselves as part of a larger national community.
- **Language and Print Capitalism:** Writers contribute to the development and standardization of the national language, which is vital for the dissemination of nationalist ideas. Anderson emphasizes the importance of print capitalism—the mass production of books, newspapers, and pamphlets—in spreading national consciousness. Poets who write in the vernacular help popularize the national language and make it a medium for shared cultural and political discourse.



**One Assyrian Identity**  
 Benyamin Arsanis

**Article: We are Assyrians. Not Syriacs or Chaldeans!**

1. We do not know our name and do not strive to know.
2. We are one drop but divided into many.
3. We should be grateful for the discoveries of Westerners of Nineveh, Erbil, etc. Otherwise we would continue with the same errors. We now know that we have roots as all nations do.
4. Some of us think we are descended from Arameans of Syria and that is why we call ourselves Syriacs (Surayeh). But this is a big mistake.
5. The name Syrian [Suraya] comes from our conversion to Christianity and its association with Syria and taking the disparagement of the prophets of the Old Testament into consideration.
6. From now on we should take on the correct name of our ancestors.
7. When we had “existence” (eitoota), we called ourselves Assyrian. Now that we are weak and dying, we adopt this term that means ruin (Syrian).

Kukhwa, May 10, 1917

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*An Assyrian wedding in Australia.*

## Assyrian Wedding Traditions - And How I Ended Up documenting Them

Andrew Rassam  
Courtesy of Assyriapost.com

*In this article, Andrew Rassam takes us through the intricacies of Assyrian wedding traditions with the help of Ramcina Gabriel, a content creator – beginning with the backstory of how a young biology student from Detroit, who had just found out he's Assyrian, teamed up with a Swede who always knew she's Assyrian, to document some of the most beautiful Assyrian wedding traditions.*

A biology lab in Detroit, a content creator in Sweden and a Google document that didn't get deleted. This is both the story of how Andrew Rassam ended up documenting Assyrian wedding traditions - and his actual documentation.

**One of the** first projects I had as part of my non-profit, *Suraye Educational Collective*, was a Google Document that outlined various parts of Assyrian culture that were rather unknown. This project was dubbed the "Cultural Document". Having just learned I was Assyrian a few months prior (a story of its own),

I was rushing with ideas on how I could play my part to preserve our culture. The idea for the Cultural Document came completely on a whim, and I started it just before midnight on January 7th of 2024. I remember being in my Biology research lab, waiting for something to finish for an experiment, and while I was waiting, I would jot down notes about festivals and cultural symbols (!) I even got three of my friends to help me with the document and add information on it regarding a number of different topics. It was a very prominent mark in my early days of being involved in the Assyrian community.

Fast forward a year later, and I decided to retire the Cultural Document for good. From late March 2024 up to the present day, it had rarely seen updates or changes in content. In fact, most of the information on it was copied straight from Wikipedia, so barely any of it was unique at all. And retrospectively, I'm pretty sure nobody really knew of its existence either. However, I wanted to make sure that before I deleted the document there wasn't any key information that I would lose. One of these sections caught my eye; the wedding traditions.

One of the three friends I mentioned earlier who helped me is Ramcina Gabriel. Ramcina is a fellow Assyrian activist and social media content creator originally from Al-Hasakah, and traces her ancestry to Hakkari from before the Assyrian genocide. Her family survived the Simele massacre and was one of many who fled to the French mandate of Syria. Currently, Ramcina lives in Sweden where she runs the Instagram page *Assyrian Explained*, and one of her first videos discussed just some of the wedding traditions in our nation. While Ramcina wrote the info about the

Khomala dress, I copied down parts of the information she discussed in her videos onto my document.

I asked Ramcina if she had any sources online that she used to help with her videos. As it turns out, there weren't any sources. She got all the information from our community elders, collected it into a script, and recorded the video. She even told me that the comments section had unique information that discussed the traditions too! As the majority of Assyrians now live in diaspora, the threat of assimilation means that these traditions and more could very well be lost in many families or even die out altogether. And so, I've decided to recount these traditions in article form; please read through as I detail the unique Assyrian wedding traditions, as partly explained by Ramcina Gabriel.

### **Silken armlets - a symbol of the unity of body and soul**

The groom and the bride will typically wear silken armlets in the colors red and white, symbolizing the





A wedding in the Assyrian Region of northern Iraq.

body and soul coming together in the new marriage. Traditionally, this armband would also have the color black to represent death, which can be interpreted as the expression “Til death do us part.” Amongst Assyrians of the Chaldean Catholic church from Iraq, the armband may be replaced with a white bow to signify the wedding as a blessed sacrament. However, this custom isn’t present among Assyrians from the Syriac Orthodox Church. Usually, the armllets are given to a newly baptized child by the priest who performs the baptism and are then kept by the family until his/her marriage.

#### Ceremonial 'stealing' from the bride's house

One tradition involves stealing from the bride’s house; there is no reason in particular why this is done, but many believe it’s a symbolic way of showing dominance over the bride’s family and her house.

Comments under Ramcina’s video, however, say otherwise. Supposedly, there are two reasons as to why an item is stolen from the bride’s house. Firstly, the stealing helps distract the bride’s family from the fact their daughter has left the house by redirecting their attention to the stolen item. In effect, this symbolizes that the groom’s family is taking the bride from her family’s house. And secondly, the stolen item will then be gifted back to the bride so that it reminds her of her family in the new home.

Another comment suggests that plates would be stolen and broken directly in front of the bride and groom. This is an ancient Assyrian tradition, rooted in the belief that Ishtar (the goddess of love and fertility) would provide the bride and groom a long, healthy marriage with children.

#### Showering of the groom (ܟܝܦܬܐ ܕܟܗܬܢܐ)

The showering of the groom, also known as “Khypta d’Khetna” (ܟܝܦܬܐ ܕܟܗܬܢܐ), is essentially the Assyrian version of a bachelor’s party. In this tradition, the groom is prepared for his new life as a wedded man, with singing, dancing, washing him with water and dressing him in new clothes.

Additional information about the tradition from Wikipedia states that at the same time, a group of female singers will sing a song called “Lilyana”, and the tradition is prominently performed by Assyrians from Hakkari and Urmia.

#### Platat kalu (ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ) and Dweqtat tarr'a (ܕܘܦܩܬܐ ܬܪܪܐ)

“Platat kalu” (ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ) is a tradition that happens right before the bride leaves her house, when the groom’s family comes to take her. The groom’s family would bring with them a basket full of walnuts, raisins, and “Kahde” (ܟܗܕܐ), traditional Assyrian cookies, to show their good intentions.

Right before the bride leaves her house, her brother or cousin blocks the door and demands a dowry from the groom’s family. Once the brother/cousin is satisfied, they will stop blocking the door and allow the bride to leave. This tradition is known as “Dweqtat Tarr'a” (ܕܘܦܩܬܐ ܬܪܪܐ), and although it’s more symbolic nowadays, it still adds a nice and playful touch to the wedding festivities.

#### The bride enters her new home (ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ)

Back in the days, before the bride steps into her new house, she would draw a cross on the door to bless it. Afterwards, she would break a jar full of candy at the entrance. This tradition traces back to the Assyrian empire, and is meant to ward off any evil and bring sweetness and blessing to the couple’s new life.

#### Gablana (ܓܒܠܢܐ)

This tradition was not actually in Ramcina’s videos. In fact, I can’t recall where I heard about Gablana, but at some point I inquired into the wedding traditions that she discussed and learned about it.

Gablana is a tradition that occurs during the wedding party, when a tree branch decorated with fruits and sugar would be auctioned to the guests for their own possession. The money would then go to the newly-wed couple as a gift to help start their new life together. This tradition is seen as a resemblance of a start to this new life, with the fruits of their love representing offspring and the sugar representing sweet memories that they’ll make together. Gablana potentially also draws a parallel to the Tree of Life symbol that Assyrians have in their culture.

The tradition stems from the Hakkari region, but could also be practiced in other parts of the Assyrian homeland nearby. Unfortunately, the tradition is not really practiced in the present day, with only a few keeping the tradition.

#### Mashmeta (ܡܫܡܝܬܐ) - The engagement ritual

As part of writing this article, I wanted to seek out other wedding traditions that Ramcina didn’t discuss in her videos. One of the traditions I found was the “Mashmeta” (ܡܫܡܝܬܐ), which means “the hearing” or “the proposal”. Mashmeta is an engagement ritual where the groom’s family formally asks the bride's family for her hand in marriage. The family of the groom will visit the family of the bride without the groom present, while the bride is in her room waiting to hear the outcome. If the woman’s family accepts, they will begin to pick a day for the engagement party, but not before telling the bride the outcome of the negotiations.

This tradition is also practiced by Chaldean Catholics from across the Assyrian homeland. Those from Iraq practice the tradition under the name “Tenatha” (ܬܢܐܬܐ), which translates to “The Word”. During this version, a traditional saying can be offered, such



as...“We would like to plant a flower from your garden into ours.” Sometimes, the bride’s mother will serve tea and the groom’s family will refuse until they “give away” her daughter, the bride. When the bride’s family accepts, the groom’s family will give her jewelry, and the families begin to get acquainted. Meanwhile, Chaldo-Assyrians from Turkey call the tradition “Ptakha Urxa” (ܩܬܟܗܘܪܟܗ).

**Dancing and zaffa - entering the wedding dancing**

Interestingly, another tradition of Assyrian weddings (one which I’ve even seen myself) is for families of the bride and groom to leave their house and dance in the streets, with music from the zurna and davula playing alongside them.

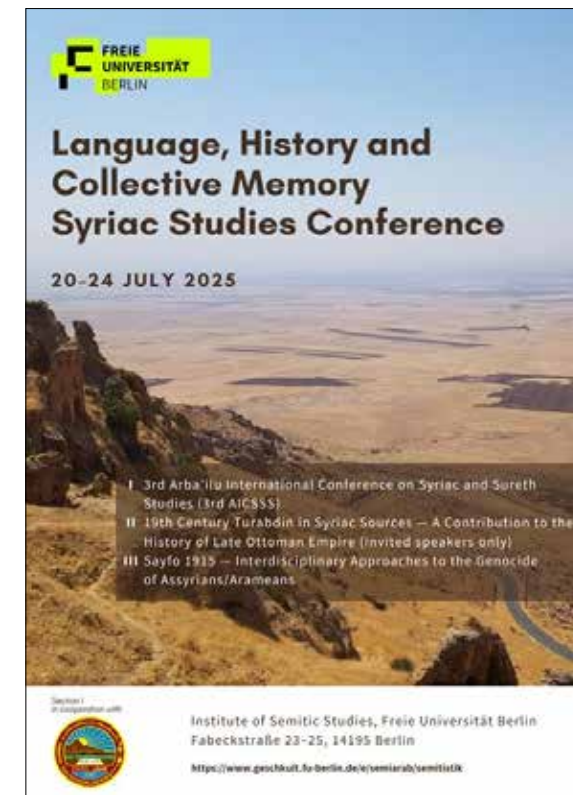
At the beginning of a wedding party, the bride and groom are introduced during what is called a zaffa (ܙܦܦܗ). During the zaffa, everyone in the bridal party dances around the bride and groom as they’re escorted into the reception hall or ceremony. The bride and groom also perform a dance of their own, accompanied by music.

**Picking a bride on the screen - the Assyrian matchmaking app before apps were a thing**

In traditional Assyrian marriages, the most common ways to have a spouse are either to fall in love with the person or to have an arranged marriage. One tradition that I’ve seen poked fun of as of lately is how families would play a VHS tape on a TV and the family’s son-to-be-wed would pick the girl of their choosing to become their wife. Family discussions would begin soon after, and if successful, the new couple is wed!

I of course couldn’t include everything about Assyrian weddings in this article; our traditions are incredibly diverse and vary from village to village, region to region. There’s probably dozens of other traditions that I neglected simply because there’s no info about them! But I certainly hope that this article intrigued many who were interested in wanting to know more about the various Assyrian wedding traditions.

*The author would like to thank Ramcina Gabriel for making this article possible since most of the information comes directly from her.*



The Conference Poster

# Five Days of Assyrian Academic Activities in Berlin

Nicholas Al-Jeloo, Ph.D.

Between 20 and 24 July of this year, I had the honor of participating in a Syriac Studies Conference titled: “Language, History and Collective Memory,” hosted by the Institute of Semitic Studies at the Free University of Berlin. This five-day feast of original scholarly contributions, bringing together a distinguished group of academics dedicated to preserving and advancing the Syriac language and its rich heritage, consisted of three sections:

1. The third Arba’ilu International Conference on Syriac and Sureth Studies (AICSSS), held in cooperation with the Syriac Language Department at Salahaddin University – Erbil, Iraq,
2. 19th Century Turabdin in Syriac Sources — A Contribution to the History of Late Ottoman Empire

- (invited speakers only), and
3. Sayfo 1915 — Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Genocide of Assyrians/Arameans.

As a whole, the conference attracted a total of more than 50 speakers from 14 different countries (19 from Germany, 13 from Iraq, three each from the Netherlands, USA and Russia, two each from Austria, Poland and Israel, and one each from Sweden, Belgium, Norway, Spain, Turkey and Lebanon), as well as a small number of local observers. The institution most well-represented was naturally the Free University of Berlin with 13 affiliates speaking, followed by Salahaddin University – Erbil with six speakers and the University of Baghdad with three speakers. It thus served as a unique multidisciplinary platform for exchanging ideas

on Assyrian/Syriac language, literature, history, and identity in a number of modern contexts.

#### Day 1: Sunday 20 July 2025



*Speech by Mr. Kaldo Ramzi Oghanna, General Director of Syriac Culture and Arts in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*

After attending Sunday mass at St. Jacob of Serugh Syriac Orthodox Church near Potsdamer Platz in central Berlin, participants gradually made their way to the Free University Campus in the southwestern suburb of Dahlem for the opening of the conference. This began at 4:20 pm with welcoming messages and greetings from Dean of the Department of History and Cultural Studies at the Free University Prof. Shabo Talay, Head of the Syriac Language Department at Salahaddin University Dr. Kawther Najeeb Askar, and General Director of Syriac Culture and Arts in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Mr. Kaldo Ramzi Oghanna.

These were followed by three keynote addresses by professors from the Free University, each relating to one of the sections of the conference. The first, presented by Prof. Dr. Beatrice Gründler, was about the medieval text *Kalila wa-Dimna*, and the role of the Syriac versions in its transmission history, while the second one, given by Prof. Dr. Elke Shoghig Hartmann, was about the Ottoman Eastern provinces in the 19th century, and that of the third speaker, Dr. Lasse Hölck, was titled: "Natural Selection? Small Scale Indigenous Groups between Extermination, Genocide and Ethnocide.

A Global View from Latin American History." The moderator of this opening session of the conference, which ended at 6:15 pm, was Dr. Anna-Simona Barbara Üzel from the Free University, who was also a member of the organizing committee. She is additionally the daughter of Fr. Murat Üzel, who has been the pastor of the St. Jacob of Serugh Syriac Orthodox Church since 2007.

#### Day 2: Monday 21 July 2025

The first section of the conference, conducted in English, Syriac and Arabic, was held on 21–23 July, and its themes included:

- Comparative linguistic studies on ancient Aramaic, Syriac, Sureth, and Arabic,
- Studies in Syriac and Sureth literature,
- Studies on Syriac, Sureth, Garshuni Kurdish and Arabic manuscripts, and
- Studies in Syriac lexicons.

Its first session began at 10 am and it was moderated by Prof. Dr. Maciej Klimiuk from the Free University. It included a stylistic study in Arabic on Deviation in Khamis Bar Qardakhe's Poem *Nawsha Sawya wa-Rghigha* ('The Longed for and Desired Soul') by Dr. Kawther Najeeb Askar, a paper on the manuscripts, authors and general features of the Erbil poetic circle during the Syriac renaissance period by Prof. Dr. Anton Pritula from the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, Russia, and another on "Eye Diseases in Syriac Medieval Medical Literature" by Dr. Alexey Muraviev from Moscow State University and PhD candidate Stanislava Khizhniakova from the Higher School of Economics National Research University in Moscow.

Following a coffee break, the next session began at 11:30 and was chaired by Dr. Yulia Furman from the Free University. It included paper on Syriac magical texts and practices, among them "An Amulet Scroll with Incantations for an Assyrian Woman from Ardishay (Urmia)" by Dr. Helen Younan-Sardaroud and "Divorcing Demons in Jewish Aramaic and Syriac: Reflections on Transmission and Religious Contact in Late Antique Iraq" by Dr. Simcha Gross, both from the Free University, as well as one on "A Syriac Magical Bowl in Manichaean Script" by Fr. Dr. Gaby Abousamra from the Lebanese University in Beirut, Lebanon, which was presented

online. This was followed by a poem in modern Assyrian titled "We Will not Forget Sayfo," delivered by Ms. Parween Shamoona Mate from the Syriac Writers Union in Erbil, who wore Assyrian traditional dress for the occasion.

The day's activities resumed after lunch at 2 pm with the third session, which featured workshops introducing modern linguistic analysis tools for studying ancient Syriac texts and showcased significant progress in



*Attendees and participants at one of the sessions of the conference*

integrating technology into Syriac heritage research. This was chaired by PhD candidate Nikita Kuzin from the Free University and included a paper by Dr. Yulia Furman regarding evidence from Syriac sources on the word *Šurtē*, and whether it meant 'prisoners of war' or 'Arabic militia.' This was followed by a presentation by Dr. Slavomír Čéplö from the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and PhD candidate Giovanni DiRusso from Harvard University concerning "Syriac Linguistics in the Age of Artificial Intelligence." Dr. Čéplö was joined in the next presentation by PhD candidate Briana Grenert from Duke University as they dealt with a word vector analysis with Simtho data about words for 'religion' in Syriac.

The fourth and final session for the day began at 4 pm after a brief coffee break, and was chaired by Dr. Salam Neamah Hirmiz Hakeem from Salahaddin University. Its first paper was a textual study of the

*Kthawa da-Zmiratha* (Book of Songs) by forgotten author Fr. Elias Sher by Abbot Dr. Samer Soreshow Yohanna from Salahaddin University, who is also the Superior General of the Chaldean Antonian Order of



*A group photo of the conference participants outside the main building of the Free University of Berlin campus*

Saint Hormizd. This was followed by a presentation of "New Words in Syriac from South India: The Witness of Kadavil Chandy Kattanar's Poetry" by Dr. Radu Mustață from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as the biography and literary works of Fr. David Barzani by the deacon Rony Eramia from Nuhadra (Dohuk), who is a PhD candidate at the Free University. The final paper for the day was delivered online in Arabic by Prof. Dr. Anmar Abduljabbar Jasim from University of Al-Qadisiyya in Al-Diwaniyah, southern Iraq, and was titled: "Gravestone Inscriptions in the Church of the Monastery of Our Lady, Protector of the Crops, in Alqosh/Mosul."

#### Day 3: Tuesday 22 July 2025

The third day of the conference began at 9:30 am and its first session was chaired by Dr. Yousef Kouriyhe from the Free University. This began with a comparative study in Arabic on the semantic overlap of phonetically similar roots in Syriac, Hebrew and Arabic by Prof. Dr. Adnan Shibeb Jasim Al-Hameedawi and Amel Adeeb Polus Baybuzi from the Syriac Language Department at the University of Baghdad's College of Languages,

examining how these shared phonological roots uncover the deep semantic connections among the Semitic languages. This was followed with a joint paper by Prof. Dr. Himdad Abdulqahhar Muhammad and Dr. Salam Neamah Hirmiz Hakeem, both from Salahaddin University, who presented a stylistic analysis of symbolism in the Syriac-Kurdish poem *Shuraya da-Qyamta* (Anthem of the Resurrection), exploring cultural interactions between Syriac and Kurdish poetry, offering literary analyses of contemporary texts and their symbolic meanings. The session's last paper was a comparative study in Arabic on pseudo-interrogative sentences in Arabic and Syriac by Dr. Laith Hasan Mohammed Al-Khailani from the University of Baghdad.



*The author with Dr. Gabriele and David Yonan*

The day's second session began at 11:30 am, after the coffee break, and was chaired by Dr. Kawther Najeeb Askar. This included a historical, documentary and archaeological study on the discovery of the monastery of Sabrisho' site in Adiabene by Dr. Barween



*The author at one of the coffee breaks during the conference with Dr. Ramazan Turgut, Dr. Anna Hager and Malfono Abboud Zeitoune*

Badri Tawfeeq from Salahaddin University, as well as an urbanistic study and investigation on the Book of Prelates by Thomas of Marga as a source for urbanism and monasteries by Prof. Dr. Amer Abdullah Najm Al-Jumaily from the University of Mosul. Both of these papers were presented in Arabic. The third session for the day began after lunch at 2 pm and was chaired by the Abbot Dr. Samer Soreshow Yohanna. It included papers on the verbal stem morphology of Syriac by Prof. Dr. Rainer Voigt from the Free University, a comparative study in Syriac and Mesopotamian literature and Jewish traditions on the debate between Cain and Abel by Sr. Dr. Luma Aphraim Khudher from Salahaddin University, as well as a presentation on new textual evidence for the 'Syriac Treatise of Shem' by Dr. Anna Cherkashina from Tel Aviv University.

After a short coffee break, the day's fourth and final session, chaired by Dr. Grace Park from the Free University, began at 4 pm and focused on late antique and medieval literature. This included papers on the "Transmission and Reception of the Syriac Ahiqar Story" by Dr. Simon Birol from the University of Göttingen and "References to Syriac in the Talmud" by Prof. Mirosław Rucki from Casimir Pulaski University of Radom, Poland, as well as one titled: "The Last of Gilgāmeš: A Mesopotamian King in Theodore Bār Kōnay's *Kṭāḇā d-ʿeskōlyōn* (Book of Knowledge)" by Dr. Alexander Edmonds from the University of Münster. The interesting thread between these three papers was the amount of Assyrian-related continuity in literature from ancient times to the middle ages. These were followed



*The author with Fr. Dr. Sharbel Iskandar Bcheiry, pastor of St. Ephrem Syriac Orthodox Church in Northlake, IL*

by the day's last paper, which was a documentary presentation by Prof. Dr. Aho Shemunkasho from the University of Salzburg, Austria, commemorating the 150th anniversary of Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Peter IV's visit to Queen Victoria.

After the day's activities, I took the opportunity to meet with Dr. Gabriele Yonan and her son David. Dr. Yonan is well-known as the author of the first specialised book on the Assyrian Genocide, and along with her ex-husband Shlemon and other activists, she was one of the pioneers of the Assyrian community in Berlin. Unfortunately, despite her previous association with the Free University, she had apparently not been invited to or even informed about the conference.

#### **Day 4: Wednesday 23 July 2025**

The fourth day's first session, which began at 9:30 am, was also the last of the conference's first section, and it was chaired by Sr. Dr. Luma Aphraim Khudher. This session's papers covered various topics including "Pilgrimage Practices of the Christians of Beth Qatraye



*The beautiful scenery at Dreipfuhl Park*

in the 6th–8th Centuries" by PhD candidate Kjetil Friestad from the University of Agder in Norway, "Defining the Terms 'Assyrian' and Suryān in the Context of Modern Lebanon" by Dr. Anna Hager from the University of Vienna, and "Regulation and Improvement of the Nestorian Districts in the Hakkari Region during the Late Ottoman Empire" by Malfono Abdulmesih BarAbraham from Augsburg, Germany.

The rest of the day was dedicated to the conference's

second section, 19th Century Turabdin in Syriac Sources, conducted in English over three sessions beginning at 11:30 am after a coffee break. This section was prominently marked by historical studies, with discussions addressing the social and religious history of the Assyrian/Syriac people in the Tur-'Abdin region during the 19th century. The section's first session, the second of the day, was chaired by Dr. Jan van Ginkel from the Free University and included papers on "The Church of the East in Qudshanis: Ottoman Policies, Internal Rivalries, and Western Intervention (19th–20th Century)" by Dr. Ramazan Turgut from Mardin Artuklu University, an overview of Turabdin in the 19th century by Prof. Shabo Talay, and "Notable Figures of 19th Century Tur-Abdin" by Dr. Anna-Simona Barbara Üzel.

The day's third session, the second of the second section, was chaired by Dr. Anna-Simona Barbara Üzel and began at 2 pm after lunch. This included a presentation of "Turoyo Manuscripts from the Sachau Collection in Berlin as a Source for the History of the Turabdin Region in the 19th Century" by PhD candidate Nicolas Atas from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, and a second paper by Dr. Simon Birol titled: "Echoes of Turmoil: Syriac Voices on Encroachments in 19th-Century Tur-Abdin," as well as one on "Western Missionaries in 19th Century Turabdin and the Reaction of the Syriac Orthodox" by Dr. Yousef Kouriyhe. The second section's and fourth day's final session was chaired by Prof. Efrem Yildiz from the University of Salamanca, Spain, and it began at 4 pm after a brief coffee break. It included papers on "Sacred Places in Tūr'abdin in a Collection of Syriac Orthodox Archives from the Late Ottoman Period" by Fr. Dr. Sharbel Iskandar Bcheiry, pastor of St. Ephrem Syriac Orthodox Church in Northlake, Chicago, "The Informal Connections between Syriac Orthodox Communities in Eastern Turkey and the Syriac Communities in India at the End of the 19th and Early 20th Century" by Dr. Jan van Ginkel, and "Early Results from a Survey Study on Community Resilience among Assyrians in Turkey" by Dr. Soner Önder Barthoma from Uppsala University, Sweden. The final paper for the day, which was to also serve as a prelude to the following section of the conference, dealt with "The Role of Naum Faiq in Documenting the Sayfo Period" by Malfono Abboud Zeitoune from Wiesbaden, Germany. After the day was done, we joined the other conference participants on a brief walk through the gorgeously scenic Dreipfuhl Park, to the Trattoria Toscana, where we were all generously



*His Eminence Dr. Mor Polycarpus Augin Aydin, Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of the Netherlands speaking at the conference*

treated to dinner by one of the members of the Assyrian-Syriac Orthodox community in Berlin.

#### **Day 5: Thursday 24 July 2025**

The last day of the conference was dedicated to the third and final section, and was conducted in English, Syriac, and Arabic over three sessions. This section, in which I participated as a speaker, aimed specifically to shed light on the fate of the Assyrians/Arameans during the First World War genocide of Ottoman Christians. Through original contributions and from an interdisciplinary perspective, it brought together scholars of different backgrounds to present new sources and less explored questions, providing a space for highly sophisticated academic discussions to gain a more profound understanding of the 1915 Sayfo Genocide. Particular attention was given to personal



*After conference drinks with Prof. Efrem Yildiz, Dr. Alexander Edmonds, Malfono Abdulmesih and Mrs. BarAbraham, and Malfono Abboud Zeitoune*

testimonies and academic research which reframed these tragic events within both Western and Syriac Orthodox discourse, contributing to ongoing efforts to achieve historical justice.

The first session of the day began at 9 am and was chaired by Dr. Soner Önder Barthoma, starting with my presentation regarding “The Story of the Massacre of Assyrians in the District of Cizre, 1915.” This was followed by papers regarding “The Written and Oral Sources from the Botan Region on the Assyrian Genocide” by Prof. Efrem Yildiz, interdisciplinary Approaches to the Sayfo 1915 Genocide of Assyrians/ Arameans by Dr. Tessa Hofmann from the Free University, and “The Assyrian/Aramean Genocide of World War I: Memory, Identity and Recognition of the Sayfo in the European Diaspora” by Dr. Sanherib Ninos from Frankfurt University.

The day’s second session began at 11:30 am after a coffee break, and was chaired by Dr. Simon Birol. The papers in this session dealt with “Theology of the Sayfo? A Survey of Discourses within the Syriac Orthodox Church” by Dr. Matthias Binder from Marburg University, the Syriac Orthodox Church’s response to Sayfo in faith, liturgy, and collective memory by His Eminence Dr. Mor Polycarpus Augin Aydin, Metropolitan of the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of the Netherlands, as well as “New Eyewitness Accounts of the Sayfo Published in Türkiye” by Malfono Yawsef Beth-Turo from Enschede, the Netherlands.

The conference’s final session, chaired by His Eminence Dr. Mor Polycarpus Augin Aydin, began after lunch at 2 pm. Its papers included one on “Nisibis and its Population at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries” by Prof. Michael Abdalla from Poznań University, Poland, as well as second presentation by Prof. Shabo Talay regarding the cultural and linguistic dimensions of the Sayfo 1915 Genocide. These were followed with closing remarks and words of thanks from the conference organizers, as well as from guests including Mr. Sabah Dawudoka from the General Directorate of Syriac Education and Mr. Akad Murad from the Syriac Writers Union, who had both come from Erbil. After this conclusion, we joined some of the conference attendees for a walk around the center of Berlin and some casual drinks, before bidding each other farewell until the next time we meet for another productive and advantageous academic gathering.



#### **Conclusion**

By its conclusion, this Syriac Studies Conference on “Language, History and Collective Memory,” as well as the affiliated third Arba’ilu International Conference on Syriac and Sureth Studies (AICSSS), reaffirmed the status of Berlin’s Free University and Erbil’s Salahaddin University as leading global academic fora dedicated to the linguistic, literary, and historical study of our people. It further strengthened efforts to revive our national and cultural identity in the diaspora, while fostering honest and open dialogue, as well as worldwide scholarly collaborations at a high academic level. It was a wonderful opportunity for those interested in all things Assyrian (including Syriac, Chaldean and Aramean) to meet and exchange ideas together without prejudice or stigmatization, and we look forward to more of such chances in future years.

I hope this report has managed to highlight just one of the many academic meetings that take place yearly which concern Assyrian history, language, culture and other related topics. In this case, the symposium in question led me to the German capital Berlin. Attending such academic conferences is vital in order for Assyrians to be able to represent themselves on their own terms and to have a voice at such international forums. We especially present more nuanced perspectives that

no non-Assyrian can possibly know about. This is particularly salient since we are a people without a state, and we do not control the academic discourse being produced about us in scholarly circles. It is of my belief, therefore, that as a people, we need to continue supporting our scholars, and working toward creating and controlling our own national narrative. More importantly, such conferences present us with opportunities for dialogue with other Assyrian academicians, as well as with non-Assyrians who study our people.

On that note, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Assyrian Foundation of America, who generously covered my travel expenses in order for me to be able to travel from Erbil to Berlin and back, in addition to sponsoring my accommodation expenses. Without such help, I would certainly not have had the financial ability to attend. Special thanks here go to Prof. Shabo Talay and his team at the Free University, as well as their collaborators from Salahaddin University – Erbil for their hard work in putting together such a wonderful meeting of minds, as well as their kind provision of all meals and refreshments during our time there.

All of the conference sessions were filmed and broadcasted by Mr. Dikran Ego from Assyria TV in Sweden, and can be watched on their website:

<https://www.assyriatv.org/>

To watch Dr. Nicholas Al-Jeloo’s presentation at the Syriac Studies conference in Berlin, see:

<https://www.assyriatv.org/2025/07/part-13-language-history-and-collective-memory-syriac-studies-conference/> or

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06q3L8SF\\_bE.vvv](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06q3L8SF_bE.vvv)



Shlama was created to connect the Assyrian Chaldean Syriac diaspora to our people in the homeland so that they can live quality lives and prosper.

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### Shlama ilokhoon!

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude for your generous sponsorship of the fourth season of the Shlama Football League. Thanks to your support, the Shlama Foundation successfully organized a women's football (soccer) league for the fourth consecutive year, with participation from 8 teams, 102 players, 16 coaches and assistant coaches, and 18 referees representing 8 different towns and villages. The league kicked off on March 28th and created lifelong memories for the players. Beyond the matches themselves, the travel involved gave hundreds of young people the opportunity to connect with peers from different parts of our homeland, fostering new friendships and stronger community bonds. The league also contributed to the local economy by supporting bus drivers, photographers, videographers, small restaurants, and cleaners.

To uphold our promise of financial transparency and ensure 100% of your donation is spent on the project, we post all of our project expenses on our website. Check out the listing <https://www.shlama.org/projects> [Project 290], with your donation and name here, and a list of purchased items along with every single receipt here.

Throughout the season, we worked with professional photographers from within our community and have organized the photos by the sponsor team for your convenience. **We encourage you to share your favorite moments on social media and tag the Shlama Foundation on Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn, or Snapchat.** By sharing these successes, you help

inspire and inform others in our nation about this important initiative. The photos are high resolution and large format, making them suitable not only for digital sharing but also for printing and displaying in your organization or office. Thank you once again for making this season possible. Your support continues to empower women, strengthen our community, and create opportunities that will last a lifetime.

**Assyrian Foundation of America** - Telsqof Sports Club W

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We are incredibly grateful to have your continued support and we want to express our sincere appreciation. Your generosity is instrumental in helping us make a positive difference in the lives of the community we serve. Thank you for believing in our mission and for being a crucial part of our community.

Sincerely, Shlama Foundation

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## The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Passing of Two of the Most Notable Assyrians of the Twentieth Century — Mar Eshai Shimun and George Mamishisho Lamsa — and Remembering Father Charles Klutz

Dr. Stephen Andrew Missick

Two of the most consequential Assyrians of the twentieth century died weeks apart 50 years ago in the autumn of 1975.

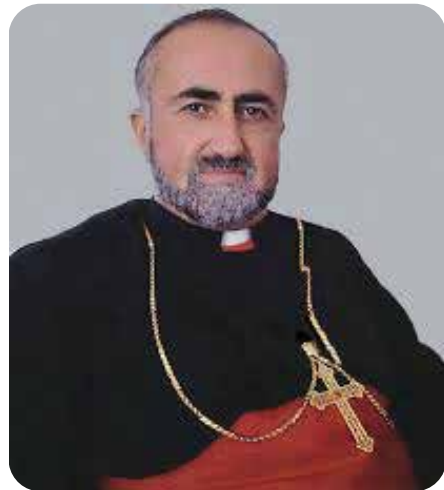
**Mar Eshai Shimun XXI** (Syriac: ܡܪܝܫܝܐ ܫܝܡܘܢ ܟܝܬܝܐ, ܟܝܬܝܐ ܫܝܡܘܢ ܟܝܬܝܐ) (February 26, 1908 – November 6, 1975) was the 119th Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East from 1920 until November 6, 1975.

In 1920, at the age of twelve, Mar Eshai was ordained as Patriarch, succeeding his uncle, Mar Paulos Shimun XX. After Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun XIX (Syriac: ܡܪܝܫܝܐ ܫܝܡܘܢ ܟܝܬܝܐ, ܟܝܬܝܐ ܫܝܡܘܢ ܟܝܬܝܐ) was murdered along with 150 of his followers by Simko Shikak (Ismail Agha Shikak), a Kurdish agha, Mar Paulos Shimun XX was elected on March 23, 1918. Mar Paulos became ill and died in displacement amid the genocides carried out by the Turks after serving for two years as Catholicos-Patriarch, and he was succeeded by his nephew Mar Eshai Shimun.

Mar Eshai Shimun's aunt, Lady Surma D'Bait Mar Shimun (27 January 1883 – 7 December 1975), was his guardian until he came of age. Mar Eshai was raised with great care, receiving the necessary theological and liturgical training from the Archdeacon of the Patriarch, Thoma of Ashita, and from the Metropolitan of Rustaqa, Saint Mar Yosip Khnanisho, who was also his uncle.

In 1933, following atrocities such as the Simele massacre of Assyrians, the patriarch was forced into exile to Cyprus, preventing him from taking residence at the newly established patriarchal seat in Bejadi, Iraq. In 1940, he relocated again, to Chicago, Illinois, in the United States. From there, he led the Assyrian Church of the East for decades.

In 1972, Mar Eshai opted to step down from his position as Patriarch, and he married the next year. On November 6, 1975, the patriarch was shot and killed at the door of his home in San Jose,



California. Mar Awa Royel, the current Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, has called for his memory to be honored during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his passing.

Many Syriac books were translated into English by Mar Eshai Shimun, including:

- Portions of the Aramaic liturgy
- *The Book of Hymns and Praises*
- Synodical Rules of the Church of the East

- *The Book of the Pearl* (The Marganitha), a standard theological work of the Church of the East. The Marganitha (Classical Syriac: ܡܘܠܬܘܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢܐ; lit. 'Pearl') is a book summarizing the doctrine of the Church of the East written by Mar Odisho, Metropolitan of N'siwin and Armenia, in 1298. The Marganitha has been described as the "official manual of the faith of the Church of the East."
- The homilies of Mar Narsai, the great saint and scholar of the fifth century.
- *The Assyrian Tragedy*, attributed to Mar Eshai Shimun, documents the national struggle of the Assyrian people prior to, during, and after World War I.

**George Mamishisho Lamsa** (Syriac: ܡܘܠܬܘܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢܐ) (August 5, 1892 – September 22, 1975) was an Assyrian author. He was born in Mar Bishu in what is now the extreme east of Turkey. Lamsa fled from the Ottoman Empire during World War I, initially settling in South America. In the 1920s, he immigrated to the United States, where he lived for the rest of his life. He studied at the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia, and at Dropsie College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He spent his life translating and teaching the Bible. On September 22, 1975, he died in Turlock, California.

*The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts* (commonly called the Lamsa Bible) was published by George M. Lamsa in 1933. It was derived, both Old and New Testaments, from the Syriac Peshitta, the Bible used by the Assyrian Church of the East and other Syriac Christian traditions. Lamsa claimed that the Aramaic New Testament was written before the Greek version, a view known as Aramaic primacy. This contrasts with the academic consensus that the language of the New Testament was Greek. Bible scholars concede that Aramaic was the language of Jesus and his Apostles, but view the Syriac Peshitta as a translation of the Bible from



Greek back into Aramaic. Viewing the Aramaic as the original, Lamsa claimed his translation was superior to versions based on later Greek manuscripts. While Lamsa's claims are questioned by the academic community, his translation remains the best-known Aramaic-to-English translation of the New Testament. There are several translations of the Aramaic Bible into English which include the Etheridge and Murdock translations, Jan Magiera's translation, and the Antioch Bible.

In addition to his translation of the Peshitta

Bible and his commentaries on the Old and New Testaments, he wrote or co-wrote multiple other books, including:

Emhardt, William Chauncey, and George Mamishisho Lamsa. *The Oldest Christian People: A Brief Account of the History and Traditions of the Assyrian People and the Fateful History of the Nestorian Church.* NY: Macmillan, 1926.

*Key to Original Gospels.* Philadelphia, Pa: John C. Winston Co, 1931.

*My Neighbor Jesus: In the Light of His Own Language, People, and Time.* St. Petersburg Beach, Fla: Aramaic Bible Soc., 1932.

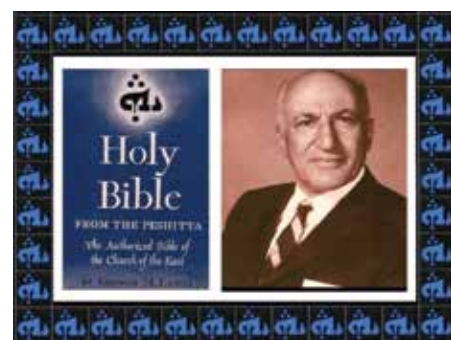
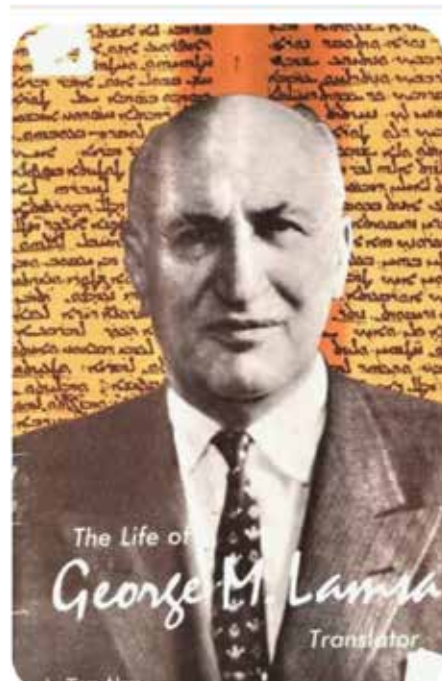
*The Kingdom on Earth.* Lee's Summit, Mo: Unity Books [distrib. Hawthorn, NY], 1966.

*The Shepherd of All: The Twenty-Third Psalm.* San Antonio, Tex: Aramaic Bible Center, 1966.

**Father Charles Henry Klutz**, age 91, a 12-year resident of the Colville, WA community, passed away on September 15, 2025, in Colville. Fr. Klutz was born on Sept. 5, 1934 in Patterson, CA the son of Frank Paul and Wilhemina Irene (Camara) Klutz.

He was raised in the Patterson and Petaluma, CA area, where he attended and graduated from high school. He then attended college and earned his bachelor's degree and was ordained a priest in the Assyrian Church of the East by Mar Eshai Shimun in 1963. Fr. Klutz began a family, and they resided in Seattle, WA, where he served as a priest of the Holy Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East. In the late 1970s, Fr. Klutz relocated to Chicago where he continued his work at St. John's Holy Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East. He retired in 2008 and continued in service of the church for five years until moving to Colville with his wife, Barbara. Barbara passed away on October 24, 2013, and Fr. Klutz remained in Colville near family.

He was a voracious reader of fiction, philosophy, history, and theology. Fr. Klutz collaborated with Archdeacon George Toma on the creation of the Catechism. He anchored his life in the sacraments and in service to the Church. His prayer life was unceasing—so much so that



he wore down his sacramental beads through constant use. Fr. Klutz loved turning introductions into lasting friendships. His wisdom, faith, and love for people will be dearly missed.

Fr. Klutz was a member of the Knights of Columbus.

He was preceded in death by one sister, Marilyn Ginger.

Fr. Klutz is survived by his sons, David Cole (Kris) of Texas City, TX, Richard Klutz (Ruby Tamayo) of Mukilteo, WA; daughters, Rebecca Kouf of Colville, WA, Ruth Ratzlaff (Terry) of Enderby, BC; siblings, Robert Klutz and Marjean Cannon both of California; 19 grandchildren; 25 great-grandchildren; several nieces and nephews.

## In Loving Memory of Nina Ovro Charbakhshi

*September 5, 1931 – October 7, 2025*

Nina Charbakhshi, born Nina Ovro on September 5, 1931, in Baghdad, Iraq, to Alexander (Sando) Avro and Katia Yelda, passed away peacefully on October 7, 2025. She was the eldest of three children; her siblings, Ninof Ovro and Inif Avro, predeceased her.

The Ovro family moved to Kermanshah and eventually settled in Qazvin, Iran, where she completed her education, and became a teacher in Qazvin.

Nina was raised in Qazvin, Iran, and on December 1, 1952, she met the love of her life, Aprim Charbakhshi, a petrochemical engineer from Urmia. They married in Tehran, Iran. Aprim started his career at the biggest oil refinery in Abadan, and they settled and built a beautiful life there. The couple was blessed with three daughters, Ninva, Stella, and Nita, and shared many joyful years together until Aprim's passing.

Nina's love and passion for teaching led her to become a well-respected prominent Education Administrator in Abadan. As a dedicated educator, Nina served as the principal of the renowned Sosan School in Abadan, Iran, until her retirement in 1982.

Nina and Aprim were able to send their daughters to the United States in late 1970's, and eventually migrated to the United States in 1982, and resided in Sunset district in San Francisco, CA. They became members of Assyrian Foundation of America (a center promoting education and culture of Assyrians worldwide).

In 1994, Nina and Aprim moved to Turlock, CA to be closer to their daughter Ninva and her late husband Edward and children Justin and Eugene. She was a devoted member of St. John Assyrian Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Turlock, CA.



She was a devoted member of St. John Assyrian Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Turlock, Ca and Assyrian Foundation of America, in San Francisco, Ca.

Nina, cherished time spent with family and friends, had a passion for cooking, traveling, and reading and enjoyed the challenge of crossword puzzles. Nina enjoyed travelling abroad and loved sharing her experiences in visiting architectural sites and museums. She liked to read, especially biographies. She enjoyed listening to music and recited Persian poems and a few parables in Turkish language. Her favorite western singers were Neil Diamond and Willie Nelson. She enjoyed solving jigsaw and crossword puzzles and playing cards with family and friends. She was an accomplished seamstress and an amazing cook. She prepared Assyrian and Persian dishes, baked cade and cakes, made jams, and homemade pickles (tursheyeh). She loved cutting flowers from her backyard and adored her garden of fresh vegetables.

She will be remembered and deeply missed for her charismatic personality and the joy of life she shared with all who knew her.

Nina is survived by her daughters, Ninva, Stella, and Nita; two grandsons, Justin and Eugene Mooshabad; two nephews, Paul and Christopher Ovro; four great-nephews; and a large circle of loving family and friends.



*Nina with her husband*

# In Loving Memory of Dr. Mary Hermes Alkhoury

March 5, 1963 – June 29, 2025



Dr. Mary Hermes Alkhoury passed away peacefully in her home on Sunday, June 29, 2025, surrounded by her husband, Dr. Jimmy Alkhoury; her beloved son, Anthony Simon; and her sister, Shamiran, after a courageous battle with cancer.

Mary was born on March 5, 1963, in Kirkuk, Iraq, to Jonathan and Victoria Hermes, both of whom predeceased her. She was the youngest of seven half-siblings: brothers Yual, Fred, Sargon, Sam, and James; and sisters Alice and Shamiran. She was preceded in death by her brothers Yual, Fred, and Sam.

Mary spent her formative years in Kirkuk, where she completed her education through high school. In 1981, with the help of her brother Fred, Mary and her parents immigrated to the United States, settling in San Francisco, California. There, she continued her academic journey, earning a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry from San Francisco State University, followed by an MBA from JFK University. Encouraged by Fred, she pursued her dream of becoming a physician

and attended medical school in the Caribbean.

In 1995, Mary earned her medical degree and began a distinguished 26-year career as an internal medicine physician at Kaiser Permanente in Oakland, California. She was deeply respected by her patients and colleagues for her compassion, skill, and unwavering professionalism.

In 1997, Mary met the love of her life, Dr. Jimmy Alkhoury. They married on July 18, 1998, and built a beautiful life together. Their union was blessed with two sons. Their first son, George Luke Alkhoury, was born and passed away on August 23, 2004. On June 8, 2006, they welcomed their second son, Anthony Simon (Tony), who became the light of Mary's life. Her devotion to her family was unmatched. A deeply spiritual Christian, she instilled in her son strong values of faith, kindness, and compassion. Her happiest moments were spent traveling with her family, attending church, and sharing the everyday joys of life with Tony. Watching him



graduate from high school and begin his studies at St. Mary's College in Moraga was among her proudest achievements.

Mary retired from Kaiser Oakland in 2023 to dedicate more time to her husband and son. She looked forward to building new memories with them and had many plans and dreams for their future together.

Mary will be fondly remembered for her extraordinary warmth, steadfast integrity, and quiet strength. She was a devoted wife, a loving and nurturing mother, a dedicated daughter—having lovingly cared for her elderly parents until their passing—a supportive sister, and a cherished friend. Her generosity, humility, loyalty,

and unwavering compassion touched all who knew her.

She is survived by her husband of 27 years, Dr. Jimmy Alkhoury; her son, Anthony Simon Alkhoury; her brothers, Sargon Hermes and James Hermes; her sisters, Alice George and Shamiran Hermes; her aunt, Gladys Yelda, and her uncle, Andrius Joseph; as well as numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and lifelong friends.

Though she is no longer with us, Mary's memory will forever remain in the hearts of those who loved her. She was a beacon of love and grace, and her legacy will endure through the lives she touched.

May she rest in eternal peace



# In Loving Memory of Odette Danielzadeh Panossian

September 10, 1961 - September 18, 2025



Odette Danielzadeh Panossian, a vibrant spirit whose warmth, courage, and generosity touched countless lives, passed away peacefully on September 18, 2025, surrounded by her loving family.

Born in Iran on September 10, 1961, to Bella and the late Yulius Danielzadeh, Odette was the second of four siblings: Rosette, Bernadette, and Bobby. From a young age, she exhibited a lively wit, fearless determination, and boundless energy. Her sister Rosette fondly recalled Odette's early demonstrations of courage, such as boldly defying playground rules at Behravesh Christian School in Tehran—a small but telling reflection of the tenacity that would define her life. On their very first day, when a playground rule forbade the girls from retrieving a ball that landed on the boys' side, Odette refused to accept the limitation. She crossed the yard and returned with the ball, hair tousled and a rip in her uniform, revealing the determination that would become her lifelong hallmark.

By the age of ten, Odette had discovered a deep curiosity for the art of cooking, eagerly watching the preparations in the family kitchen. This early fascination grew into a lifelong passion for culinary creativity and ultimately shaped much of her professional and personal life.

In 1976, Odette and Rosette immigrated to the United States, where they were welcomed into the home of their uncle and aunt, Martin and Gail Jacob, in San Francisco. Two years later, the rest of the family joined them. Odette completed her early education at Drew College Preparatory School and later graduated from San Francisco State University. She earned master's degrees in International Relations and Political Science in 1984 and was especially proud of her early career supporting refugees through the International Rescue Committee.

Odette met the love of her life, Abraham (Apo) Panossian, in 1990. They married on May 26, 1991, beginning a partnership defined by devotion, mutual respect, and a shared generosity of spirit. Their union blessed them with two children, Serouge Agop (born 1995) and Lisabelle Anahid (born 1998), who remained her greatest pride and joy.

A visionary entrepreneur, Odette founded Rubin's and expanded her culinary ventures to include Thai-to-Go, Wraps-to-Go, and

Custom Corporate Catering, earning a reputation for excellence, innovation, and reliability. Her work fueled a lifelong love of travel, allowing the family to explore the world, create cherished memories across dozens of countries, and nurture a profound connection to their heritage, particularly through visits to Assyrian villages in Armenia.

Known for her generosity and love of entertaining, Odette's home was a welcoming haven where friends and family gathered to share laughter, feasts, and unforgettable memories. Her hospitality extended to the broader Panossian family, weaving enduring bonds that reflected her warm, inclusive spirit.

For three years, Odette faced cancer with remarkable bravery, embodying the resilience and determination that had defined her since childhood. In her final days, her focus was on meeting her first grandchild, a wish joyfully fulfilled when she held her grandson, Aram Yulius Panossian, in her arms on the morning of September 18, 2025. Later that evening, surrounded by her loving and grieving family, Odette passed away peacefully, leaving behind her pain and entering the

eternal embrace of her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Odette is survived by her devoted husband of 34 years, Abraham Panossian; her son, Serouge Agop, and his wife, Sarin, along with their son, Aram Yulius; her daughter, Lisabelle Anahid, and her fiancé Emilio Chebly; her mother, Bella Danielzadeh; her sister, Rosette, and her husband, Rene Eshoo, and their children and grandchildren; her sister, Bernadette; and her brother, Bobby. Odette is also survived by numerous aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, and dear friends who will hold her memory close.

Odette's legacy is one of unwavering love, courage, and generosity, a life lived fully and with joy. She will be remembered as a devoted wife, a loving mother, a cherished sister, and a proud daughter of the Assyrian nation, leaving an indelible mark on all who knew her.



# Evin Agassi: One Year Without the Voice of a Nation

BY: ONITA M. NARSO & BRYNNER AGASSI



It has been one year since the passing of legendary Assyrian singer Evin Agassi, and yet his presence still lingers in every conversation, every memory, and every song. Not a single day has gone by without someone sharing their love, admiration, and longing for him. When he left us, candlelight vigils illuminated communities across the world, and social media overflowed with photographs, tributes, and stories from those who were shaped by his music. This past year, people have continued to express how deeply they miss him, yet remain captivated by his voice, his lyrics, and the timeless power of his songs.

**Brynnner shared with me that while he has given interviews before, this one feels different. "It's hard to explain in words," he said. "Because it's not just about music, it's about my father, my best friend, my mentor. I want people to feel what I felt—not just read it. That's the part that worries me the most. I don't want the essence of my words to get lost in translation."**

## Early Life & Background

Evin was born in Kermanshah, Iran, the third of four brothers, and raised in a modest home. His father worked tirelessly to provide, while his mother nurtured the family with love and devotion even in the most difficult of times. From childhood, Evin was captivated by music. Brynnner recalled how his father often told stories of building his own guitar out of a piece of wood and a few strings, a child's invention that revealed the depth of his passion long before he ever stepped on a stage.

Musically, he drew inspiration from all directions. He loved Perry Como, Mario Lanza, Charles Aznavour, and especially Manolo Escobar, whose song El Porompompero became one of Evin's signatures throughout his career. Iranian artists also left a deep mark, particularly Akbar Golpayegani and Vigen, the latter inspiring him to blend Western and modern elements into Assyrian music in a way that was both unique and timeless.

Above all, though, his Assyrian identity shaped him from the very beginning. Growing up in a region where his people often faced persecution and injustice, Evin understood the importance of preserving language and culture. Together with his brother and lifelong collaborator, Givargis, he discovered that through music and lyrics, they could give their people something no one could take away: a voice. From Iran to Iraq, Syria, and across the ocean to America, his songs united Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs, offering hope and reminding them of their shared story.

**"There are so many stories about his youth that shaped who he became," Brynnner explained. "When I tell them, it's not just for the sake of remembering details. It's because they show you how determined he was, how he carried a dream inside of him even as a boy. I want people to feel that part of him."**



## Musical Career & Contributions

For Evin, music was never a career in the traditional sense—it was his very essence. There was no "Plan B." He didn't sing for fame, fortune, or recognition. He sang because he was born an artist, compelled to create, to express, and to give. As Brynnner shared, "My father never pursued notoriety. He simply allowed his art to speak for itself. His thoughts, emotions, and convictions poured into melodies and lyrics that carried far beyond himself. His inspiration was the purest form of passion. He told me once, 'I just had the need to create, to express, and to share my voice with the world, because I loved it so deeply.'"

Every song told a story. Prashta and Meni Vi captured the pain of distance and exile. Kholma and Khela D'Khoba celebrated the depths of love. Sheshelta, Roosh, Ata, and Hayer carried political urgency, each lyric a call for awareness and unity. His music was never entertainment alone, it was a mirror reflecting his people's struggles, triumphs, and hopes.

Yet if one song defined his mission, it was Khazade. Released in 1983, it was more than music—it was a battle cry, an anthem of identity and survival that shook the ground beneath his people. "When I talk about Khazade," Brynnner stated, "I don't want people to just read the name of the song. I want them to imagine being in the room when he sang it, to feel the way the air shifted, the ground almost moved under your feet. That was the power of his voice, and that's the essence I don't want lost." Nearly four decades later, Khazade remains untouchable, closing concerts not only out of respect for Evin, but because it has become a national anthem for the Assyrian people.

The reactions of audiences across the world proved his impact. In Syria, fans once lifted his car and carried it through the streets. In Iraq, the government tried to stop him by cutting electricity and water, but people still came in droves, refusing to let the music die. In Iran, during years when pop music was banned and patriotic songs could not be sung publicly, Evin sang anyway—defying the restrictions and giving his people courage. His songs were blacklisted by Saddam Hussein's regime, and Assyrians risked prison simply for listening, yet they spread like wildfire through underground networks. In the early 1990s, when Iraq's government offered him millions to perform, he refused, because he would never sing for those who persecuted his people. That was Evin—his art was his weapon, his shield, and his banner of truth.

And the reach went beyond Assyrians. Arab singers, through their Assyrian neighbors, learned of his voice, and some even covered his songs, such as Ismail Al Farwachi with Len Miro. In India, Bollywood reimagined Rawaya. In Iran, legends like Googoosh performed his Sahel Va Darya (Sneeqa) in the 1970s, and Ebi sang Mischeena in Assyrian. His voice crossed boundaries of culture and language, rippling far beyond the Assyrian community.

Even outside the Middle East, when non-Assyrians heard his voice, whether in a concert hall, on social media, or through word of mouth, the response was always the same: awe. They didn't need to understand the words, because music itself is a universal language. They felt the power, the conviction, and the soul behind the sound. That was the mark of Evin's greatness.



### Personal Life & Character

To truly understand Evin Agassi, you have to step away from the stage lights and look at the man behind the microphone. Off stage, he carried himself with a heart of gold. He was humble, kind, loving, empathetic, and unfailingly honest. Brynner described him as the person you wanted in your life when the world grew heavy. “He used to remind me,” Brynner said, “that anyone can stand beside you in moments of joy, but true friends are the ones who remain by your side in the darkest hours.”

That’s how he lived. During the happiest occasions, Evin found joy in watching others smile and celebrate. But in times of struggle, he made sure he was present, not only for his family, but for anyone fortunate enough to know him. Nothing came before the bond he had with those he loved and cared for. His courage, too, was remarkable. He never once compromised his vision of being a voice for a silenced nation. Even when his music placed him in direct conflict with governments in the Middle East, he never backed down. He carried the banner of unity on his shoulders, using music as his weapon of truth, his shield of hope. That is who he was—a man defined by his values, living proof of how powerful a voice, a lyric, and a song can truly be.

At home, though, Evin was far from the fierce stage presence the world knew. He was a homebody at heart, happiest when surrounded by family. After nearly six decades of traveling and performing, he found peace in simple pleasures: his coffee, his water, iced popsicles, fruit, and even the occasional bag of cheese puffs.

He also had a playful side. One of his guilty pleasures was video games, particularly Pac-Man, a game he mastered. Brynner remembers him laughing as he told stories about sneaking into arcades in Chicago in the early 1970s, staying out late just to play Ms. Pac-Man. When Brynner got his first Nintendo console, his father would sit beside him, watching until bedtime, and then take over the controller himself. “Some nights I’d wake up for school,” Brynner recalled with a laugh, “and find him just heading to bed, saying, ‘Don’t press any buttons—I paused the game, I finally got to this level!’” Even in recent years, Evin’s phone was filled with game apps. He loved to play, loved to laugh, and filled the house with jokes and joy.



But even in his quietest moments, music never left his side. A keyboard was always nearby—often sitting on the kitchen table—ready for him to play when inspiration struck. He would hear a note from another room and immediately chase it, sketching melodies into microcassettes and later onto his phone. For him, music wasn’t a career or even a craft—it was woven into the fabric of his being.

Above all else, Evin was a family man. He didn’t spend his free time chasing attention or going out; he wanted nothing more than to be home with his loved ones. If Brynner and his siblings were home, so was he. If they were out, he was at home with their mother. Even when his travels pulled him away, he made up for every second when he returned. And distance never lessened his presence, he always called, no matter where in the world he was. To his family, he wasn’t the star on stage, he was a husband, a father, a constant source of love and stability

### Advocacy & Community Involvement

For Evin, there was never just one cause. If it had to do with the Assyrian people, he was there. He was always the first to lend his voice at fundraisers, church events, and community gatherings, offering not only his time, but his music, presence, and spirit.

When H.B. Mar Meelis Zaia asked him to create an album in Australia to raise money for the church, he did so without hesitation. In 2023, when His Holiness Mar Awa III requested a song for the opening of the Patriarch’s home in Erbil, he proudly composed it. Brynner recalled nights when his father donated the money he was meant to earn directly to the church or to families in urgent need. For Evin, every Assyrian cause was his cause.

But his impact went beyond music, it was about unity. His songs transcended divisions, embraced by Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs alike. At the time of his passing, people from every part of the community came together to honor him, standing side by side in shared grief and admiration.

His music and his persona created a rare space of togetherness, something I deeply cherish and admire as an activist. His greatest advocacy, however, was through his music. His songs carried the story of Assyrians everywhere, from Iraq to Europe to the United States. He sang in Assyrian deliberately, believing language was the lifeline of identity. Each song became a chain link that bound our scattered people together, reminding them who they were and where they came from.



### Legacy & Lasting Impact

Evin’s legacy runs deeper than music—it has become part of Assyrian history itself. When an Assyrian flag is lifted high, his voice is there in its shadow. His songs didn’t just entertain, they taught, comforted, and inspired. They made people reflect, rise, and hold on to who they are. He had his hand on the pulse of an entire nation, and that is why, even today, his songs feel brand new. The message hasn’t changed, the lessons haven’t faded, and his presence will always stand with us.

For Brynner, carrying that legacy has been personal. Since his father’s passing, he and his uncle Givargis have traveled to cities across North America, with plans for Europe, Australia, and Iraq, sharing stories from the studio and the stage, and keeping Evin’s spirit alive. One project especially close to their hearts is a forthcoming book that will feature 55 of Evin’s songs, along with the stories behind them and the original handwritten lyrics Givargis penned when they first began their journey together.

In these journeys, Brynner has been reminded that people stood with Evin not only in the best of times, but also in the hardest. Every handshake, every story told by community members has been a reminder that his father’s work is not finished—it lives on in every voice that sings his songs, in every memory shared, and in every heart that still beats with his music.

The greatest lesson Evin left us is simple: love your people. That love means giving of yourself without seeking recognition, building, preserving, and protecting for the sake of those who come after. He believed that without our voice, we lose our language; without our language, we fade. His life was proof that against all odds, we endure. His legacy is a call to action: to live for our people, to fight for them, and to never let the flame of who we are be extinguished.

His music, too, has been preserved. Every album, every single, from the very first to the very last, has been remastered and made available across digital platforms, ensuring future generations can hear his voice as vividly as ever. Across YouTube, social media, and gatherings worldwide, his songs are still shared not as nostalgia, but as living expressions of pride, love, and gratitude for a man who gave everything to his people.

### Closing & Tribute

When asked what message he would send to his father today, Brynner’s voice grew quiet: “I love you... I miss you... We did it. I won’t stop—not yet. Until it’s my time to play drums for you again.”

What Brynner says he’ll never forget is his father’s calmness. No matter the situation, Evin carried a peace rooted in his faith, a belief in God that guided him through the toughest of times. He never doubted that everything would be alright. Alongside that calmness was a quiet joy, a gift for making even the hardest days feel lighter, and a reminder that there was always something worth smiling about.

One year has now passed, but his voice still sings. His message still resonates. And his spirit continues to inspire. For his family, and for Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs across the world, Evin is not gone. His music is eternal, his lessons are eternal, and the love he carried for his people continues to bind us together.

# Books in Review

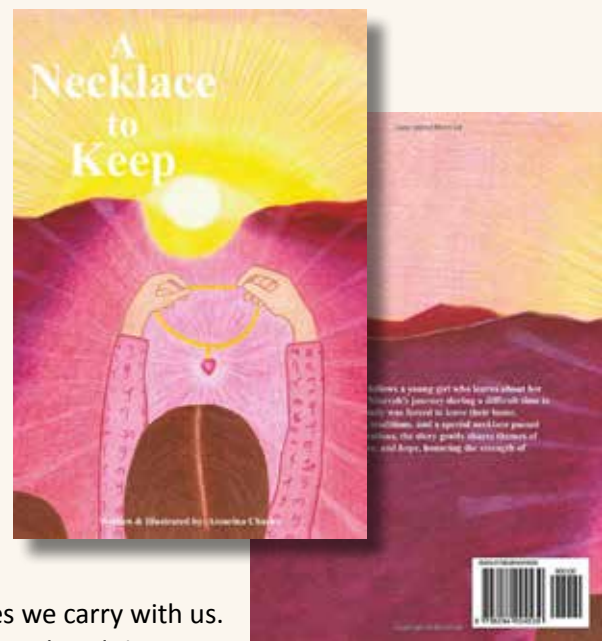
## A Necklace to Keep

by Mrs Atourina Charles

A Necklace to Keep is a tender Assyrian children's story about love, memory, and the unbreakable bond between mothers and daughters. Hand-illustrated with paper and colored pencil, this one-of-a-kind book follows young Nineveh as she navigates childhood, loss, and the quiet magic of remembrance. When a cherished necklace goes missing, a dream leads her on a journey that connects past to present and reveals that what's truly precious is never really lost.

This book is a celebration of heritage, resilience, and the stories we carry with us. Perfect for children ages 4–9 and anyone who cherishes family and tradition.

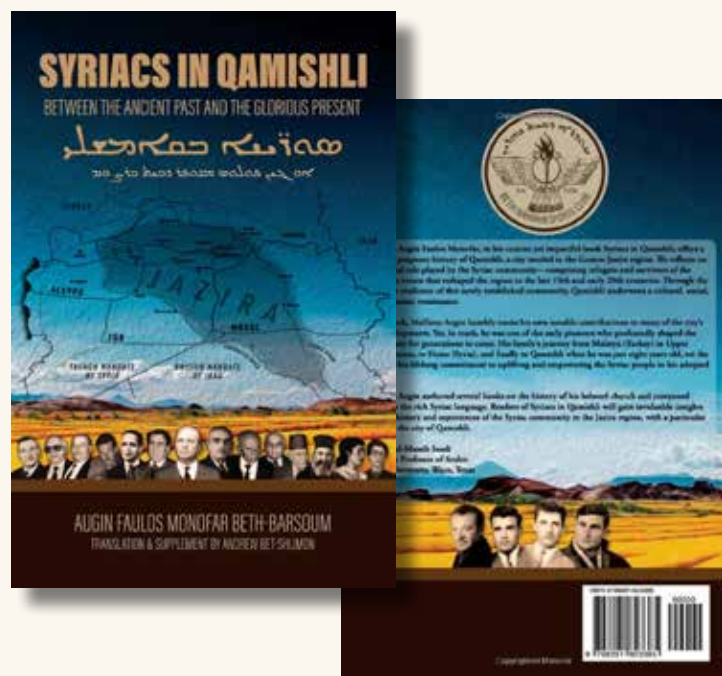
*The book can be purchased on Amazon.com*



## Syriacs In Qamishli: Between the Ancient Past and the Glorious Present

by Augin Faulos Monofar Beth-Barsoum  
Andrew Bet-Shlimon (Translator)

The story of the Syriac people in Qamishli is one of resilience, cultural richness, and an enduring commitment to heritage. For nearly a century, the Syriac community in Qamishli has been a cornerstone of this city, shaping its cultural, economic, and social landscape. This book, *Syriacs in Qamishli*, is a tribute to their journey; a historical exploration that documents the lives, struggles, and achievements of a people whose legacy spans generations. This book is both a historical document and a celebration of the Syriac spirit. It is intended for anyone interested in the history of Qamishli, the Syriac/Assyrian people, or the broader story of cultural endurance. By capturing the Syriac experience in Qamishli, we hope this work contributes to a deeper understanding of a community that is both ancient and evolving, proud yet forward-looking, and forever part of the story of this remarkable city.



## Assyrians in Hamadan

by Hannibal Gevargiz & Dr. Arianne Ishaya

This book makes a valuable contribution to the study of the history of towns and cities in Iran (formerly Persia). In an age marked by constant political upheavals and the displacement of civilian populations, many readers seek to understand what becomes of these uprooted communities—how they endure homelessness, preserve their identity, and rebuild their lives.

The focus of this study is the Assyrians, who were forced from their ancestral homes in northwest Iran during World War I. Only a fraction survived, finding refuge in Kermanshah and a few other Iranian cities. This book examines the history of the Assyrian community in Kermanshah, tracing their struggle, resilience, and lasting contributions.

Remarkably, though they arrived as destitute refugees, the Assyrians soon became a stable and respected part of Kermanshah's society through hard work and sacrifice. Even within the relatively short span of five decades (1920s–1970s), they contributed significantly to the city's educational, economic, and cultural development. Assyrian women played a pivotal role in education, founding and directing some of the city's most popular elementary schools, where hundreds of Muslim and Christian children were educated each year. Assyrian physicians and nurses staffed the American Mission hospital, while engineers and architects from the community helped shape the city's growth.

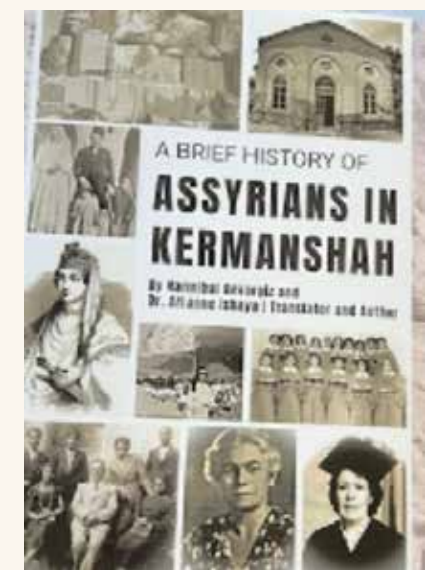
Without an independent homeland, Assyrians remain scattered across the world. Yet they have preserved their identity through strong family ties and community networks that transcend both distance and time.

Today, most Assyrians from Kermanshah live in the United States. This book, enriched with family photographs, images of churches, and monuments from Kermanshah, offers them the opportunity to see their history preserved in print.

Ultimately, this study will also be of interest to researchers examining the history of American Protestant missions in Iran, particularly their contributions to education, healthcare, and social welfare within the communities they served.

This book is available on Amazon.com.

Arianne Ishaya



# Books in Review

## Assyrians

by Romane Iskaria

Assyrians recounts a photographic survey conducted over two years with the Assyrian community by Romane Iskaria. This book offers the reader a journey through the Assyrian community and its history, alternating between photographs, archival images and a collection of intimate objects, punctuated by testimonies. Through a documentary and fictional approach Assyrians sheds light on this disappeared territory and its community.

Romane collected testimonies from members of the Assyrian community between Belgium and France, complementing the stories of her own grandfather and the notebooks of her great-grandfather who arrived in France from Iran. The photographer investigated by gathering the stories of this diaspora composed of different generations. Objects transported during exile, family photos, traditional outfits for festivals, figurines of protective figures from ancient Mesopotamia, landscapes, and maps appear. By blending past and present, Romane photographs by intuition and also uses fiction to evoke this quest for origins present in each of us. A project to keep a memory, a trace. To portray a scattered people trying to preserve their connections despite the distance.

### LAUREAT

2022 Belgian Photo Books which will be shown at the Rencontres d'Arles in France in July 2022.

**PRIZE** 2022 Lauréate Belgian Photobooks presentation at the Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles FR

### PRESS

9 lives magazine article

L'Intervalle blog du critique Fabien Ribery

- Le Chant de l'exil par Romane Iskaria

Interview Fédération Assyrienne de France, Assyria TV

### KICKSTARTER

crowdfunding campaign in Kickstarter

POLKA MAGAZINE article

### EVENT

TIPI BOOK SHOP : soirée de lancement du livre Assyrians à la librairie TipiBookShop à Bruxelles Belgique le 23 juin 2022



**First edition 300 copies Format 28,5 x 21,5 cm 130 pages Auto publishing English - French Hardcover book Design and conception Camille Carbonaro, MACARONI BOOK Launch June 2022.**

by Sargoon SH Keso



## Assyrian Speech Lessons – Book 3 Foundation Level – Student Manual

by Dr. Madeleine Davis

Dear all,

I'm pleased to inform you that Speech book 3 for students is finally available from [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com). I published it in June and I spent several months editing three versions!! I hope this version is mistake-free if that is ever possible!

This manual provides a comprehensive introduction to the Continuous Present tense in the Assyrian language, focusing on the most commonly used verbs. The construction of this tense is explained through the combination of verb infinitives with the present tense of the auxiliary verb "to be."

**Foundation Book 3** expands students' communicative competence by presenting vocabulary and grammatical structures that enable them to describe a wide range of everyday activities. Through contextualized examples and exercises, learners will acquire the language needed to discuss actions such as eating, drinking, cooking, shopping, dancing, singing, conversing, sleeping, praying, playing, studying, visiting, watching, and more.

This volume is organized into ten lessons, each containing ten exercises in addition to supplementary tasks designed for self-assessment. A concise grammar chapter outlines the principal types and morphological measures of roots in the Assyrian language. It further explicates the rules governing the formation of the gerund and infinitive for each root measure. In addition to a mini-dictionary, the book provides a verb table consisting of four columns, which present the root, infinitive, gerund, and corresponding English meanings. The text also includes a table of adverbs of manner, many of which are infrequently encountered in contemporary usage. Nevertheless, the inclusion of these classical forms serves as a valuable reference tool for students, particularly in preparation for more advanced reading.

**Prerequisites: Students are expected to possess prior knowledge of reading and writing in Assyrian, as well as a foundational understanding of the present tense forms of the verbs "to be" and "to have" in the Assyrian language.**

I hope to be able to prepare the videos teaching this book soon.

Wishing you all the best,

Madeleine Davis

**Pease go to [lulu.com](http://lulu.com) to purchase this book**

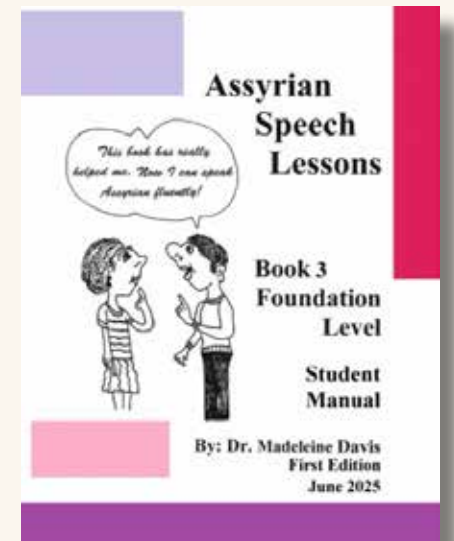
Publication Date Jun 10, 2025

Language English

Category Education & Language

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Contributors By (author): Dr. Madeleine Davis





**MAX YABAS,  
PRESIDENT DE L'UACF**

**NOTRE INTEGRATION EST UNE  
VICTOIRE CONTRE LE RACISME  
ET LES DIVISIONS**



## NINWAY MAG

### Ninway Magazine: Europe's only printed Assyrian publication

By Antoni Yalap

<https://ninwaymag.wordpress.com/>

In the heart of Sarcelles, a city north of Paris known for its cultural diversity, a remarkable publishing venture was born. What began in 2013 as the dream of five childhood friends has since become a unique phenomenon in Assyrian media: *Ninway Magazine*, the only printed Assyrian publication in Europe, a quarterly that has outlasted all predecessors and carved its place both within the community and among the world's most prestigious libraries.

#### A friendship that shaped a magazine

The story begins with Neshra, Issa, Antoni, Samuel and Ekrem, five men who grew up together in Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s. Linked not only by friendship but also by a shared sense of duty to their people, they remained inseparable after immigrating to France. By the mid-1990s, they were already active in the associative world, organizing cultural events, supporting community initiatives, and raising awareness of Assyrian heritage.

But they wanted to go further. In 2013, the group set themselves a bold challenge: to create a serious, independent, multilingual magazine that would give Assyrians in Europe a lasting voice in print. Months

of planning and preparation followed. Finally, in June 2014, their idea materialized into a magazine of 32 pages, printed in an ambitious first run of 10,000 copies.

The name they chose was deeply symbolic: *Ninway*. The title combines "Nin", a nod to Nineveh, the legendary capital of the Assyrian Empire, with the English word "Way," suggesting both a path back to Mesopotamia and a way forward into the future. It was, quite literally, the road to Nineveh.

#### From humble beginnings to a prestigious quarterly

That first issue may have been modest in appearance, but it carried weight. Within its 32 pages lay articles on history, language, culture, and current affairs, subjects too often ignored by mainstream publications. Readers immediately recognized its value.

Over the following years, *Ninway* grew steadily in scope, quality, and prestige. What once fit into a thin stapled booklet has expanded into richly illustrated issues of over 120 pages, printed on fine paper and bound to professional standards. The magazine today resembles a cultural review more than a simple community newsletter. Each issue is the fruit of work

by more than 30 volunteer writers, supported by photographers, videographers, graphic designers, and correspondents scattered across Europe, the Middle East, and the United States.

By early 2025, *Ninway* had released 37 issues, amounting to over 2,000 pages of content, hundreds of features, interviews, and studies covering not only the Assyrian past but also the challenges and successes of communities today.

### Backing and independence

From the very beginning, the magazine benefited from the support of patrons. Businessman André Diril, president and founder of LBA, was among the first to believe in the project. The city of Sarcelles also lent its backing, recognizing *Ninway* as a valuable contribution to cultural life.

Yet despite this support, the editorial line has always remained fiercely independent. *Ninway* is free from political or partisan influence, guided instead by a commitment to integrity, scholarship, and cultural preservation.

Today, a wide network of sponsors, donors, and partners continues to sustain the magazine, ensuring both its financial stability and its editorial freedom.

### A singular longevity

The history of Assyrian periodicals is, unfortunately, one of fragility. From *Hammurabi* to *Huyada* to *Les Lions de Babylone*, countless publications have appeared over the past century, only to fade after a handful of issues. Scattered diasporas, financial obstacles, and shifting readerships too often spelled their demise.

In this context, *Ninway's* longevity is nothing short of remarkable. More than a decade after its conception, the magazine continues to publish quarterly issues without interruption, making it a rare exception in the annals of Assyrian publishing. It is not only a publication but a living record of resilience.

### Multilingual, multinational, multigenerational

*Ninway* is proudly multilingual, with articles in French, English, Turkish, Western and Eastern Aramaic, and Arabic. This linguistic diversity mirrors the global Assyrian diaspora itself and allows the magazine to speak simultaneously to different generations: the elders who cherish Aramaic, the youth more fluent

in European languages, and the wider audience of scholars and enthusiasts.

Distributed free of charge across France, Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas, and accessible online at *ninway.fr*, the magazine has thousands of readers worldwide. Its reach is not limited to the community: *Ninway* is archived in the catalogues of some of the world's leading universities, where it serves researchers as a reliable source on Assyrian culture, history, and current affairs.

### Beyond the magazine: The Assyrian Academy

In 2015, the founding team created the Assyrian Academy (*Académie Assyro-Chaldéenne*), the non-profit association that publishes *Ninway*. Its mission is broad: to promote Assyrian identity, preserve the Aramaic language, collect audiovisual archives, and safeguard the memory of a people.

The Academy operates with complete volunteer commitment: no salaries, no personal gain. All efforts are poured back into cultural, educational, and humanitarian activities. Over the years, it has collected more than 100,000 photographs, thousands of videos, and hundreds of audiovisual documents, forming one of the largest modern archives of Assyrian life.

The Academy also produces documentaries, organizes photographic exhibitions, and conducts educational outreach in schools to raise awareness of Assyrian history and culture, as well as broader issues such as discrimination, inequality, and antisemitism.

The Academy has also launched *Ninway TV*, a media platform that broadcasts cultural programming, event coverage, and documentaries across multiple languages and platforms. It has organized exhibitions, produced films, and intervened in schools to raise awareness of both Assyrian history and broader social issues such as discrimination and inequality. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it distributed hygiene products and medical supplies, cementing its role as both a cultural and humanitarian actor.

Recognized as a public-interest organization and affiliated with the *Ligue de l'Enseignement*, the Academy is authorized to issue tax-deductible donation receipts. Its facilities, including a modern studio, are provided by the city of Sarcelles, a steadfast institutional partner.

### A cultural institution in its own right

More than a decade after its conception, *Ninway* has become much more than a magazine. It is an institution: a cultural landmark for Assyrians in France and beyond, a tool for scholars worldwide, and a bridge between generations of Assyrians scattered across continents.

Where others have faltered, *Ninway* has endured. What began in 2013 with five friends and a dream has become the only printed Assyrian magazine in Europe, a richly illustrated quarterly of over 120 pages, distributed around the world, archived in top universities, and cherished by thousands of readers.

For a publication of diasporic origin, this recognition marks a major milestone, situating *Ninway* not only as a community magazine but as an academic and cultural reference. By publishing in French and making Assyrian heritage accessible to new audiences, *Ninway* also plays a crucial intergenerational role. It connects younger Assyrians, born and raised in Europe, to their ancestral roots, while also introducing the wider public to the historical and cultural wealth of one of the world's oldest peoples.

In the fragile world of diaspora publishing, this achievement is nothing less than historic. *Ninway* is not just the voice of Assyrians in France, it is the living memory of a people, and a way forward toward a shared future.





## NOUVELLE PARUTION

### **Vous serez libres, mes filles !** L'Orphelinat français du Bosphore

Sur l'initiative de **Elishwa Ide-Doman**  
avec la collaboration de **Marie-Hélène Normand**  
& **Fortunato Maresia**



### **Présentation**

Juché sur une colline surplombant les rives du Bosphore, offrant une vue époustouflante, l'orphelinat français de Bebek a marqué la vie de toute une génération de jeunes assyro-chaldéennes.

Accueillies dans cette Maison tenue par les Filles de la Charité surnommées "Hirondelles d'Allah" par les Turcs, ces petites filles originaires des villages assyro-chaldéens du sud-est de la Turquie étaient envoyées à Bebek pour être protégées des rapt et bénéficier d'une scolarité.

Ce livre témoigne de leur attachement à cet orphelinat brutalement fermé en 1998. "Vous serez libres, mes filles !" est un hommage poignant à toutes ces Soeurs qui ont dévoué leur existence au service des plus pauvres.

**Elishwa Ide-Doman** est née dans un village assyro-chaldéen de l'Est de la Turquie. Elle a vécu son enfance dans l'Orphelinat. Aujourd'hui, elle vit en France avec sa famille.

**Marie-Hélène Normand** a connu les Assyro-Chaldéens en Turquie, par la Caritas. Elle a recueilli les témoignages.

**Fortunato Maresia** a accompagné les Filles de la Charité dans toutes leurs démarches jusqu'à la fermeture de l'Orphelinat.

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**LUNDI 12 MAI 2025 A 20 HEURES**

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7-11 rue du Champ Gallois, 95200 Sarcelles

**ISBN : 978-2-9562-9931-8**

Mars 2025, 332 pages, 25 €



SCANNEZ POUR COMMANDER

Editions Ninway - 11 rue du Temple, 95200 Sarcelles - ninwaymag@gmail.com



ASSYRIAN ARTS INSTITUTE  
presents

## GILGAMESH

MEET THE COMPOSER & LIBRETTIST

**DERRICK SKYE** **DIANA FARRELL**

## Gilgamesh, the opera: A World Premiere Rooted in Assyrian Heritage

The Assyrian Arts Institute proudly announces the world premiere of Gilgamesh, the opera at the Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts on March 28, 2026. This 120-minute groundbreaking opera is inspired by a 4000-year-old Mesopotamian tale, the Epic of Gilgamesh, brings to life the world's oldest epic and celebrates one of humanity's most enduring stories.

Commissioner: Assyrian Arts Institute

Executive Producer: Nora Betyousef Lacey

Artistic Director & Librettist: Diana Farrell

Composer & Conductor: Derrick Skye

Dramaturg & Ethnomusicologist: Dr. Eve Georges Sada

### **An Ancient Story Reimagined**

Gilgamesh, the opera brings to life the heroic journey of the demigod king of Uruk, Gilgamesh, dramatizing themes of friendship, grief, legacy, and the universal human desire to be remembered. As OperaWire, an international media outlet noted in its July 2, 2025 feature on the project, this opera is already gaining recognition in the wider cultural press for its ambitious blending of Middle Eastern and Western musical traditions.

Farrell, whose Assyrian heritage deeply informs her work, describes the opera as "a meditation on the difference between legacy and immortality. Immortality is rooted in fear and control — the desperate attempt to outlast time. Legacy is an act of generosity: the

choice to lift others, to leave behind a world better than the one you inherited.”

### A Monumental Collaboration

This production marks the first artistic collaboration between Assyrian Arts Institute and Lyric Opera of Orange County, supported by the Bridge to Everywhere orchestra. According to the official press release by Lyric Opera OC, the opera will combine “sweeping music, songs in Akkadian language, breathtaking visuals, and choreography inspired by Assyrian dance traditions” to create a theatrical experience that is both epic and unforgettable.

The Gilgamesh opera’s Grammy nominated composer Derrick Skye is internationally recognized for blending classical traditions with contemporary influences to create music that transcends borders. Farrell, a versatile producer, artistic director, and soprano, has dedicated her career to developing works that highlight inclusivity and cultural representation. The dramaturge for the opera, Dr. Sada’s dedication to authenticity stems

from her belief that our ancestors fought tirelessly to safeguard our nation and make us proud-now, it is our responsibility to present our identity with the utmost professionalism. Together the vision of this dream team, Gilgamesh’s Creative Team, ensures that Gilgamesh is not only an opera, but a cultural milestone.

### Why It Matters

For Assyrians, the Epic of Gilgamesh is a cultural heritage that has endured through centuries of exile, displacement, and resilience. By presenting this opera on a global stage, the Assyrian Arts Institute is affirming the power of cultural memory and giving voice to a people whose stories continue to shape civilization.

As Farrell reflected in her interview with OperaWire, “For Assyrian people, who have survived nearly 1,500 years without a nation-state, Gilgamesh is more than myth — it’s metaphor. It’s about how a people endure through memory, art, and shared purpose.”



Ashtar Ashurseen, AAI’s Director of Cultural Dance Integration, Dance to the Genesis of Enkidu music, September 7, 2025, Wine of the gods Gala at the Morgan Estate, CA.



Sarah Ego, Diana Farrell, and Michael O’Halloran, Ninsun aria, September 7, 2025, Wine of the gods Gala, the Morgan Estate, CA.



Diana Farrell, Derrick Skye, Khochaba Youkhana, Dr. Eve Sada, Nora Lacey, Ashtar Ashurseen at Intensive Dance Workshop for Gilgamesh Opera, August 31st, 2025, Assyrian National Convention, Anaheim, CA.

### Join Us

We invite the Assyrian community and friends of the arts to be part of this historic world premiere.

March 28, 2026

Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts, Cerritos (near Los Angeles), California

Tickets are now available through Ticketmaster. Scan the QR code or visit the Cerritos Center website to reserve your seats.

This once-in-a-lifetime performance promises to leave a lasting impression on all who attend.



Assyrian artist, Qais Al-Sindy, Live painting of Gilgamesh, September 7, 2025, Wine of the gods Gala, the Morgan Estate, CA.





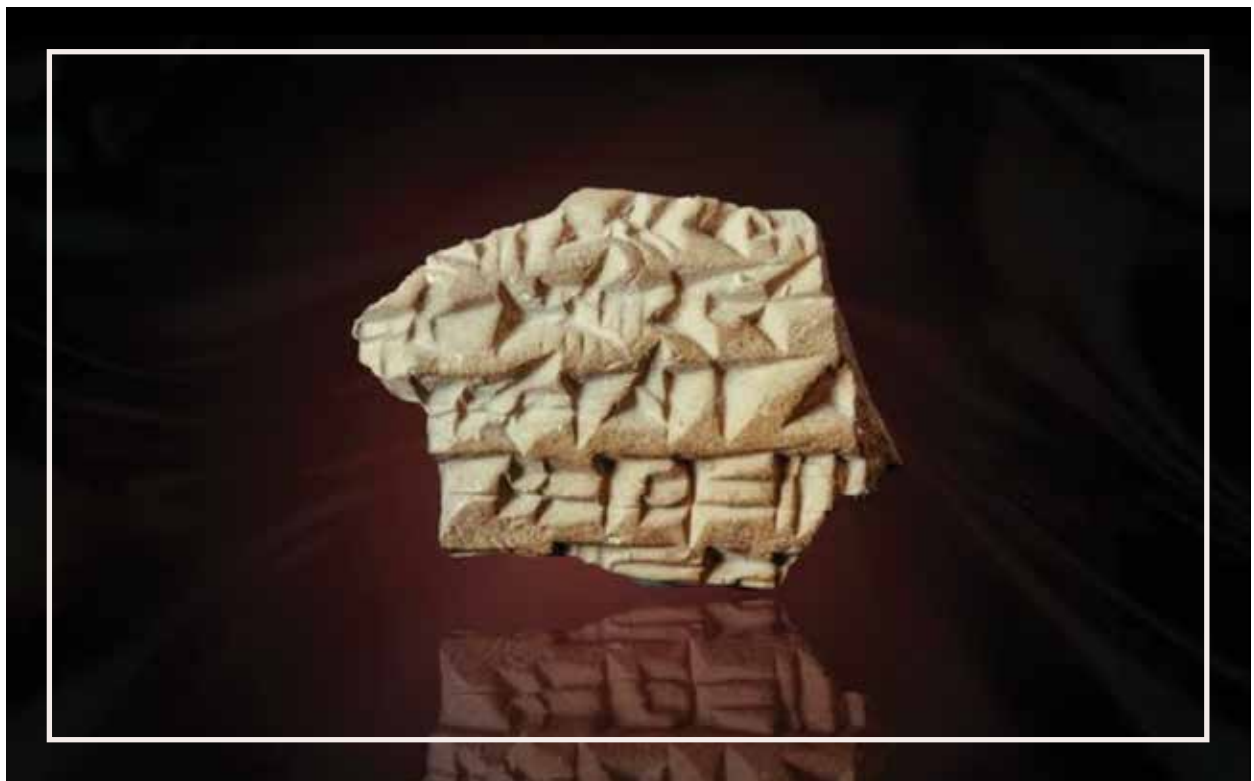






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A fragment of pottery featuring cuneiform writing and dating back to some 2,700 years was unearthed in excavations near Temple Mount in Jerusalem, marking the first Assyrian inscription ever found in the city, in a discovery announced on October 22, 2025. (Emil Aladjem/Israel Antiquities Authority)

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