



# NINEVEH

CULTURAL | EDUCATIONAL | SOCIAL



## Message from the President

### *The Power of Community Connection*

One of the greatest joys of being President of the Assyrian Foundation of America is witnessing how our Assyrian community continues to grow stronger through connection—especially here in San Francisco, a city known for its beauty and diversity, where our community continues to thrive.

I recently had the pleasure of attending a happy hour in the city in celebration of Akitu, our Assyrian New Year. It was inspiring to see so many young Assyrians—many of whom now call San Francisco home—gathered in such a joyful, vibrant space.

In that room, I saw more than just a group of friends; I saw a family, united by shared values, a common language, and a deep cultural heritage that continues to bind us across generations.

I was especially thrilled to see that a few of the young adults I met at the happy hour also attended the Assyrian Foundation of America's Appreciation Event on Sunday, April 6, which featured a powerful keynote by Dr. Michel Shamoon-Pour. Their participation speaks volumes about the growing commitment of our next generation to remain connected and engaged with our culture.

Moments like these remind us of the profound importance of community connection—not as a luxury, but as a vital part of who we are. Our strength lies in coming together, supporting one another, and proudly celebrating our traditions. When we unite, we do more than preserve our culture—we live it.

As a lifelong San Franciscan and proud member of the Assyrian community in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, I encourage all local Assyrians to get involved. Whether you're new to the area or a longtime resident, there's a place for you. From cultural institutions such as the Assyrian Foundation of America to spiritual homes like the Assyrian Church of the East, our community offers many ways to connect, celebrate, and contribute. Join us, show up, and share your voice. Our Assyrian community is unique, welcoming, and full of heart. We are stronger when we come together.

If you're interested in getting involved with the Assyrian Foundation of America, we'd love to hear from you! Learn more about our work, upcoming events, and ways to participate by visiting [assyrianfoundation.org](http://assyrianfoundation.org) or emailing us directly at [info@assyrianfoundation.org](mailto:info@assyrianfoundation.org).

We welcome everyone—whether you're reconnecting with your roots or discovering them for the first time, you'll find a community here that feels like home.



*Jackline Yelda*

*President, Assyrian Foundation of America*

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

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# What is Assyrian New Year?

The Assyrian New Year, known as *Kha b’Nissan* (First of April) or *Akitu*, is a major celebration for the Assyrian community all over the world, as it gathers to renew its ties to its heritage and collective past.

The Assyrian New Year is traditionally observed on the first full moon after the spring equinox, particularly when the flowers bloom, signifying the renewal of life in ancient Assyrian religion.

By Sarah Gawo  
Courtesy of <https://www.auaf.us/blog/what-is-assyrian-new-year>

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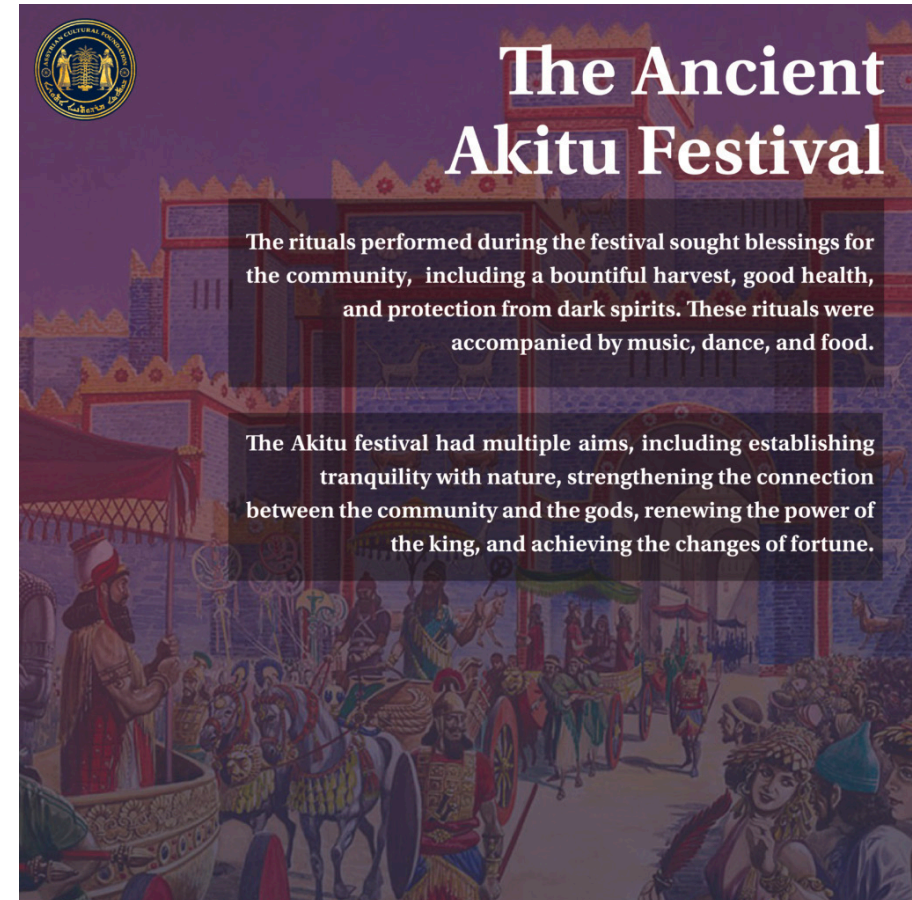
The Assyrian New Year is traditionally observed on the first full moon after the spring equinox, particularly when the flowers bloom, signifying the renewal of life in ancient Assyrian religion. However, with the spread of Christianity in the Middle East, many modern Assyrians have abandoned the celebrations due to their adherence to the Christian faith and the distrust of what Christian clerics considered pagan practices.

Nationalism’s rise among Assyrians led to organized efforts to revive ancient traditions, and so *Akitu*, having lost its religious standing, became a cultural event.



This blog delves into the history of the festivities of the pre-Christian Assyrian New Year. I will discuss the cultural and religious practices that were prevalent among the Ancient Assyrians.

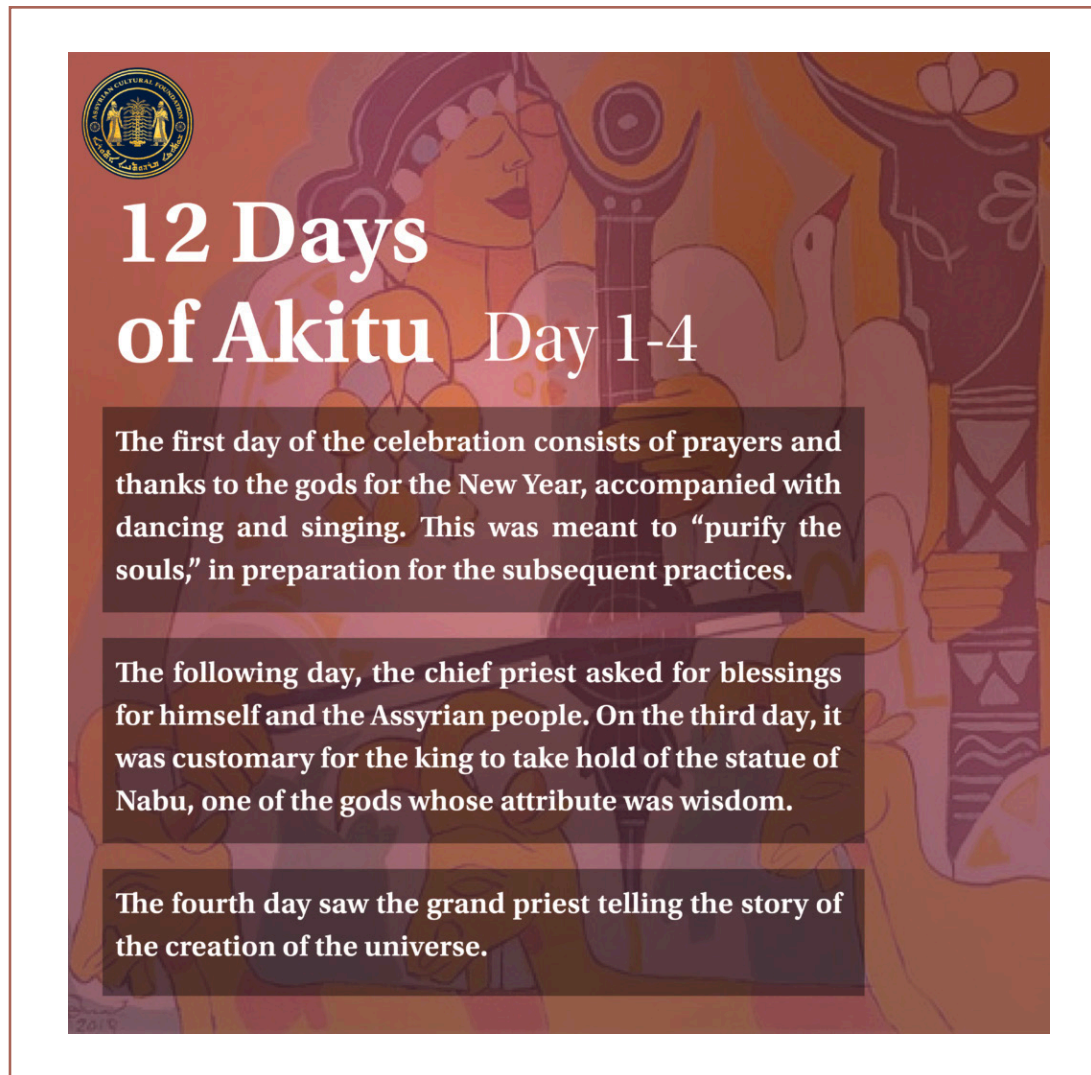
The rituals performed during the festival sought blessings for the community, including a bountiful harvest, good health, and protection from dark spirits. These rituals were accompanied by music, dance, and food. The *Akitu* festival had multiple aims, including establishing tranquility with nature, strengthening the connection between the community and the gods, renewing the power of the king, and achieving the changes of fortune. The ancient Assyrian New Year is a characteristic of the rich cultural heritage of the Assyrian community, and it continues to motivate and shape their traditions today.



## The Ancient Akitu Festival

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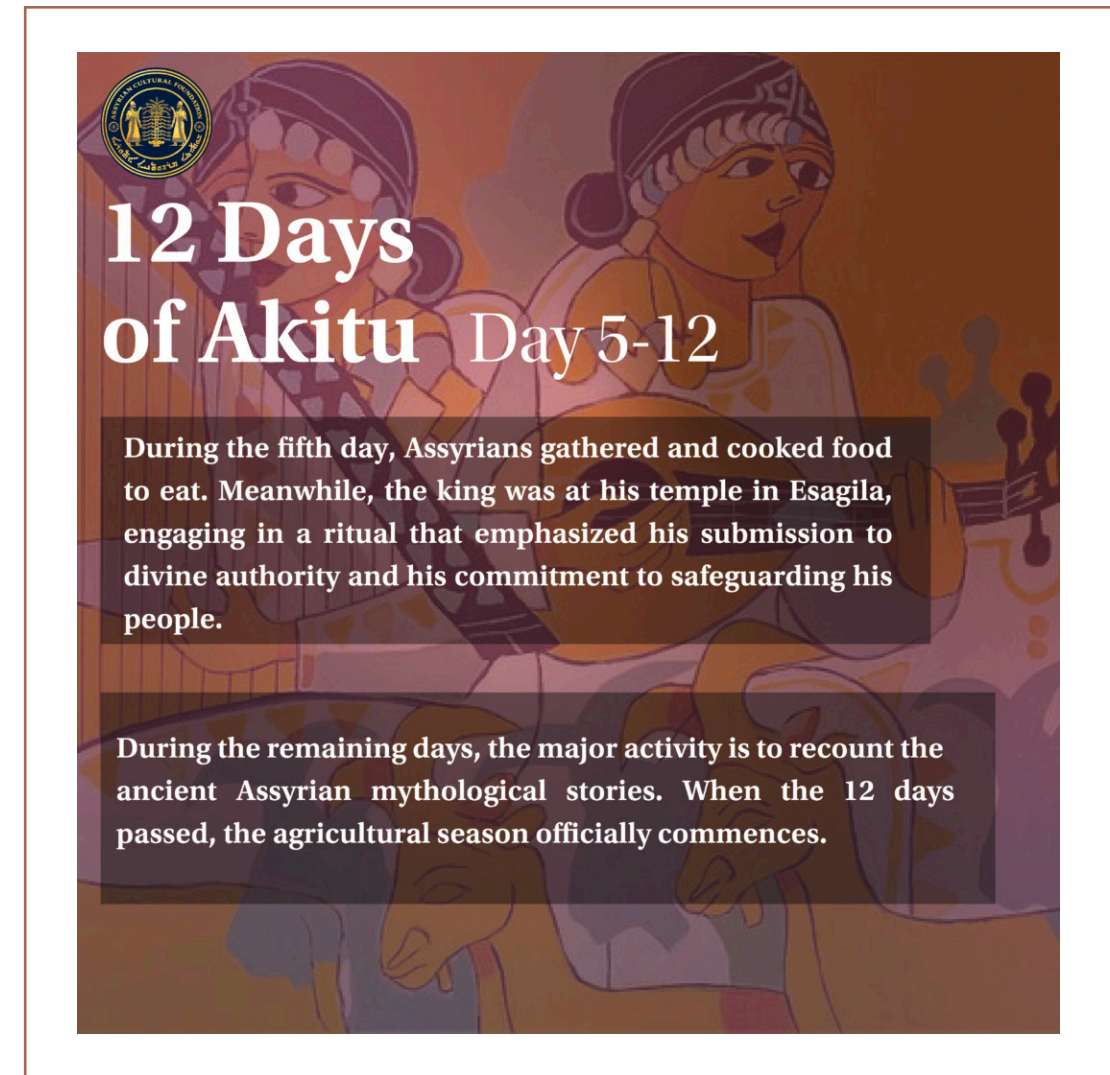


**12 Days of Akitu Day 1-4**

The first day of the celebration consists of prayers and thanks to the gods for the New Year, accompanied with dancing and singing. This was meant to “purify the souls,” in preparation for the subsequent practices.

The following day, the chief priest asked for blessings for himself and the Assyrian people. On the third day, it was customary for the king to take hold of the statue of Nabu, one of the gods whose attribute was wisdom.

The fourth day saw the grand priest telling the story of the creation of the universe.



**12 Days of Akitu Day 5-12**

During the fifth day, Assyrians gathered and cooked food to eat. Meanwhile, the king was at his temple in Esagila, engaging in a ritual that emphasized his submission to divine authority and his commitment to safeguarding his people.

During the remaining days, the major activity is to recount the ancient Assyrian mythological stories. When the 12 days passed, the agricultural season officially commences.

The first day of the celebration consists of prayers and thanks to the gods for the New Year, accompanied with dancing and singing. This was meant to “purify the souls,” in preparation for the subsequent practices. The following day, the chief priest asked for blessings for himself and the Assyrian people. On the third day, it was customary for the king to take hold of the statue of Nabu, one of the gods whose attribute was wisdom.

The fourth day saw the grand priest telling the story of creation. In other words, the grand priest will recite the story of the creation of the universe and all four seasons.

During the fifth day, Assyrians gathered and cooked food to eat. Meanwhile, the king was at his temple in Esagila, engaging in a ritual that emphasized his submission to divine authority and his commitment to safeguarding his people. In this ritual, as part of his demonstration of loyalty to Assyria, the king would be required to strip down and bow before his Lord Assur. This ritual was a display of submission and obedience to the God Assur, attesting the king’s dedication to preserving Assyrian culture and his subservience to his Lord. At the end of this ritual, the high priest will give the king back his robe and jewelry.

During the remaining days, the major activity is to recount the ancient Assyrian mythological stories. When the 12 days passed, the agricultural season officially commences.

**This year, the Assyrian community will celebrate the marking of 6775 years. We highly recommend that everyone attends the New Year festivities!**

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Assyrian New Year Festival: 6765/2015 by Assyrian Universal Alliance Australian Chapter

# Homeward Bound: A Journey to Celebrate Akitu in Assyria

**This past year, my sister Orianna and I embarked on a deeply meaningful trip to Iraq to celebrate Akitu, the Assyrian New Year, in Dohuk (Nohudra).**

This was our second time visiting our ancestral homeland, and once again, the experience was nothing short of life-changing. Despite the many backgrounds of people we met along the way whether Assyrian, Muslim, Yazidi, or otherwise one thing remained constant: we always felt completely at home. Every moment was filled with warmth, joy, and a profound sense of belonging, reaffirming that Iraq is and will always be the heart of our people.



**By: Onita & Orianna Narso**

Akitu holds incredible significance for Assyrians worldwide, as it stands as the oldest continuously celebrated festival in human history. Throughout centuries of genocide, persecution, and displacement, our ancestors have preserved these traditions, passing them down through generations. For me, attending Akitu in Iraq was more than just a celebration it was a testament to the resilience and survival of our identity. Even when we cannot make the journey to the homeland every year, it is essential that we continue to honor these traditions wherever we are, ensuring that future generations understand the beauty and endurance of our culture.

Visiting Iraq, despite the challenges facing Assyrians today, is a powerful statement of existence and pride. Although we are no longer the majority and our population has diminished, our presence there is a reminder that we are rooted in that land. Our history, our celebrations, and our very being are tied to it. Through trips like this, we honor our ancestors, inspire our youth, and demonstrate that our connection to Iraq is eternal. Orianna and I left Nohudra with full hearts, strengthened spirits, and an even deeper commitment to celebrating our heritage — no matter where life takes us.



**Orianna:**

Growing up, I listened to my parents tell stories of their lives in Iraq, fascinated by how they attended an all Assyrian school, sports clubs and parties at Nadi Ashouri, and the extremely loving Assyrian community. The next day, I would go to school and tell my friends about their stories of Iraq, as if I lived them myself. I was connected to a country, to a life that I never lived and never thought that I would be able to visit.

Now, I have visited Iraq twice; once at a church conference and this past April with my sister for Assyrian New Years.

On my second trip, I attended the Akitu festival in Nohadra, spent time with the locals, and explored the villages. The Akitu Parade was a breathtaking event, forty-thousand Assyrians from Iraq and around the world came to celebrate in Dohuk. From above, you would see Assyrian flags flying in the air, colorful feathers of poshiyeh, headdresses decorated in silver, and the vibrant colors of Julet Khomala. For 3 hours, young and old attendees walked, sang, and danced through the streets of Dohuk to celebrate 6775 years of Assyrian heritage in Iraq. People stood outside their stores to watch, traffic stopped, and even a group of Polish tourists joined us in celebration. This massive event serves as a reminder to the world, though we are dispersed, Assyrians are still present in their ancestral homeland.



After both of my trips, I felt a renewed desire to celebrate my culture, take on leadership roles in California's Assyrian community, learn about our history, how to better help Assyrians in Iraq, and explore the different Assyrian dialects. Without a doubt, visiting Iraq will leave you feeling proud, grateful, and with a desire to uplift Assyrians locally and abroad. It is essential for us to visit Iraq, learn about our ancestral homeland, see our villages, and reconnect with Assyrians who are still living there. If you haven't been, I strongly urge you to go, whether it be with Gishru, with your church, or on your own. Every Assyrian deserves to walk on the land that our ancestors fought and bled for, in order to rekindle their connection to our homeland.

# The Assyrian New Year – Why 6775

Fred Aprim - April 1, 2025

On this day, Assyrians around the world celebrate the Neesanu Festival (Akitu) or the Assyrian New Year 6775. In ancient times, this celebration, which took part at the start of spring, was a symbol of revival and a major theme in ancient Assyrian and Babylonian religions. Assyrians viewed the start of spring as the “start of a new life.”

Despite its ancient roots, some have continued to challenge the celebration, claiming that 6775 is far too old to be reliable. As people initiated settlements and civilizations, they needed to start creating calendars and the start of New Years for religious, agricultural and other reasons. Earlier civilizations used many different types of calendars, including solar, lunar and solilunar (lunisolar) calendars. Then emerged the concept of setting up the new year and we know that the earliest records of the New Year Festival emerged in Mesopotamia. The New Year was declared with the appearance of the new moon after the vernal equinox. Here, Spring and farming began and the new year was set with the concept of revival, rebirth through the start of the new moon. The appearance of the new moon varied from March 20 into the beginning of April sometimes.

Today, humanity is fortunate that modern technologies allow archaeologists to estimate to a very reasonable proximity the period of excavated human remains, buildings, tools, etc. For example, what makes a specific civilization three thousand years old is that archaeologists have discovered enough evidence from human remains, their places of residence, places of worship, the tools they used, etc. at a certain location known to be the undisputed home of those people and the studies of those archaeological remains had pinned those people's presence to three thousand years ago.

We know from such archaeological discoveries that Eridu, with its mounds of Abu-Shahreïn or Nowawis, which are about 130 miles from the coast in southern Iraq date back as far as 6500 BC. We also know that at least by 5000 BC<sup>2</sup> city-states flourished in Babylonia (southern Iraq) and by

4500 BC expansion and conflict between those city-states were taking place.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that people lived in Babylonia for at least 6500 years, if not longer.

The Assyrians have inhabited Assyria (northern Iraq) from time immemorial. Unlike fictitious or fabricated stories by other people occupying today that region, archaeological evidence has linked Assyrians to northern Iraq for over 7000 years – an undeniable fact according to historians. H. W. F. Saggs relied on such archaeological evidence to prove this fact. He states that first steps towards agriculture around 'Aqra and also at a location 30 miles from Mosul plain has been dated by radio- carbon analysis to around 9000 BC. He states that we can follow the development process of controlling food supplies from sites on the outer fringes of Assyria at Jarmo (a permanent village of 20 or so houses, with a population of about 150 people), north-east of the ancient Assyrian city of Arrapha (Kirkuk)<sup>4</sup>, there was a settlement of 3 to 4 acres occupied from about 7000 onwards. Saggs continues to stress that the earliest type of settlement in the Assyrian plains is named from the site of Umm Dabaghiyeh, 15 miles west of Hatra. Settlements are found also north towards Jebel Sinjar. Early farming culture on the Assyrian plains is found at Tell Sotto dated 6000, discovered by the Russian excavators. Around that same period of 6000 we find farming settlements at Hassuna 22 miles south of Mosul.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, but not least, we know of the presence of a stone object bearing the name of Sargon, King of Sippara, 3800 BC<sup>6</sup>, which adds up to approximately 5800 years from today.

These examples show reasonable proof that people settled Assyria at least 7000 years ago and that such people are the early ancestors of modern Assyrians. Though there is no documentation of the new year celebration in those early days, the existence of early Assyrian settlements is clear. Therefore, it is very reasonable to consider that such people celebrated the “start of a new life” in one form or another.

Official records of the Persian New Year (birth of new life) known as Nowruz did not appear until the 2nd century, but most historians believe its celebration dates back at least as far as the 6th century BC.<sup>7</sup> If historians believe that the Persians celebrated the new year 6th Century BC, that would make the event more than 7000 years old. In ancient Egypt, the temple was considered the point at which the god came into existence at creation. In ancient Israel, temples were center of worship and national identity. In Mesopotamia, a temple was not only the house of the local deity or the patron god of the city, it was the seat of both religious and secular authority. Life centered around temples – they meant everything for the early settlements and/or cities. Settlements of early Assyrians led to the establishment of temples that could have taken after Ashur, the deity, and that does not necessarily refer to the ancient city of Ashur, modern Qal'at Sharqat. Today's Assyrians built new churches as new communities are established and expanded and they name them after holy men even if churches with such names already existed. Meaning, a temple of Ashur could have been erected earlier than that in the ancient capital city of Ashur, albeit they could have not necessarily been that grand. The first temple of Ashur could have been erected anywhere around those early Assyrian settlements.

The birth date of Jesus, one could reason, is uncertain. If this is so, should billions of Christians reject or abandon December 25? The date of December 25 was set at a later time to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and people accepted it. Setting approximate or new dates for early events does not take away from the essence and importance of an event. The practice has many precedence. Consider setting January 1 as the new year. In 1968, educated Assyrians and members of the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) designated April 1, 1968 as the Assyrian New Year 6718, the official national day for Assyrians. The year was set based on the establishment of the foundation for the first temple of god Ashur, which is agreed to have been created in 4750 BC and considering many archaeological facts, few of which I listed earlier. Although the Assyrian new year was officially declared a National Day of Importance in 1968, Assyrians commemorated the arrival of spring in one form or another much earlier and for centuries.

For a people like the Assyrians, the new year celebration represents not only their historical past, but their deep-seated desire to “start a new life” in the form of a national revival steeped in ancient history. In Dohuk, the Assyrian

Democratic Movement has been setting up massive parades annually for a few decades already. Prior to the 2020 Covid-19, it is believed that 30,000 to 40,000 Assyrians from throughout Iraq and the neighboring or nearby countries like Syria, Iran, Turkiye, Armenia and Russia participated in those early days' parades. With the establishment of moderate levels of democracy in Iraq post the 2003 US invasion, many NGO Assyrian groups were established. GISHRU is one of these organizations, which was established in 2012. The group organizes and conducts humanitarian and educational trips for Assyrians born in the Diaspora to the ancestral Assyrian homeland in Turkey and northern Iraq. The diverse and multifaceted itinerary includes guided day trips to Assyrian archeological ruins such as Nimrud and Khinnis as well as ancient churches and monasteries, participation in relief efforts, activities in remote farms and villages from Fishkhabor and Nahla to Baghdeda and Alqosh, and interactive workshops with local Assyrian student and youth groups.<sup>8</sup> Participating in the Assyrian New Year parade and visiting the Assyrian villages in northern Iraq has become a tradition for Gishru. According to one participant, close to 150 Assyrian youth from the US and Europe were in Gishru's trip to the homeland this year to celebrate the Assyrian New Year 6775. Other Assyrian groups participated as well, such as that of the Assyrian Aid Society of America.

The connection between the Assyrian diaspora and the Homeland is a bond, a spiritual and moral engagement. Assyrians must ensure that this bond is enriched, which will benefit both the remaining indigenous Assyrians in the Homeland and those of the diaspora. This bond preserves the Assyrian national identity as it plays a vital role in slowing down the assimilation of the Assyrian diaspora. The bond encourages the Assyrians in the Homeland to remain connected to their ancestral lands, because the bond will remind them that they will always have a voice to defend, or reach out to, them when and if needed. This physical, emotional and moral engagement has in many cases fostered, despite in a modest way, Assyrian villages developments, social progress, and cultural revitalization sponsored by some reputable Assyrian organizations in the West. Consider the most recent contributions of the Assyrian Foundation of America to the efforts of rehabilitation of the Etuti Learning Center and its Ashurbanipal Library in Baghdeda (established in 2017 after the liberation of Nineveh from ISIS) and also to the Assyrian Aid Society's humanitarian and cultural projects in northern Iraq.

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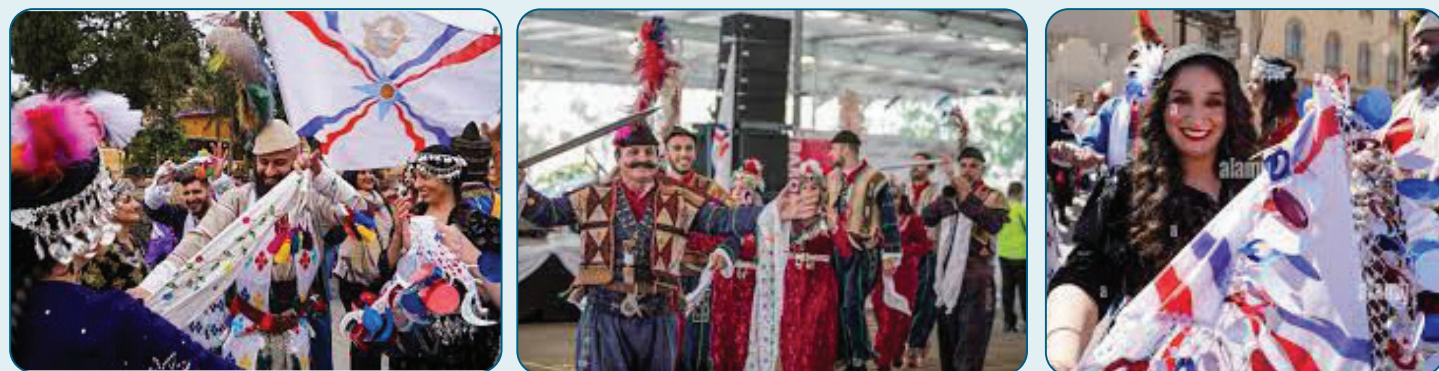
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*The Assyrian reliefs at the British Museum. Exhibition Design by RAA. Immersive exhibits by Journey. Photography courtesy of Journey. Photographer Alberto Romano.*

## Journey Reveals First Immersive Digital Exhibits at The British Museum

*By Charlotte Coates*

**Journey, a global design and innovation studio pioneering multidimensional experiences (MDX), along with Ralph Appelbaum Associates (RAA), a multidisciplinary firm specializing in the planning and design of museums, exhibits, educational environments and visitor attractions, has helped to elevate the visitor experience at The British Museum with two groundbreaking exhibits.**

The exhibits—the Vindolanda Tablets in the Roman Britain Galleries and the Lion Hunt Reliefs of Ashurbanipal in the Assyrian Galleries—provide a fresh way to engage new generations of museum visitors.

Museums are traditionally quiet spaces with unchanged exhibits. Journey’s innovative approach transforms them through multidimensional storytelling, enabling more profound connections with ancient artefacts in a sensory-rich experience.

### **The Lion Hunt Reliefs**

In the Assyrian Galleries, guests find themselves in the ancient landscapes of Ashurbanipal’s empire. The Lion Hunt Reliefs, a

story etched in stone over 2,500 years ago, spring to life with a vibrant mix of sound and light. As spotlights highlight different portions of the relief, visitors are enveloped by the booming sound of chariot wheels and the growls of lions.

The exhibit builds to a climax with vibrant projections of color, light, and dust, resulting in a memorable experience that blends archaeology with contemporary design.

### **The Vindolanda Tablets**

The Roman Britain Galleries invite visitors to explore a rich narrative about daily life on the fringes of the Roman Empire. Featuring wooden writing tablets known as ‘The Vindolanda Tablets,’ found near Hadrian’s Wall, the exhibit opens with a vibrant digital presentation encouraging visitors of all ages to engage with these ancient inscriptions.

The Tablets, displayed within the exhibition design and interpretation by RAA, feature the voice of a Roman wife narrating the earliest example of female handwriting in Britain: a birthday invitation.



The exhibit provides various levels of engagement, ranging from simple anecdotes that attract children to comprehensive archaeological analyses. Visitors are immersed in the world of ancient Romans through an evocative soundscape, where whispered voices recount stories of life on the edge of the empire.

These galleries are part of a pilot initiative, signaling a new direction for The British Museum and paving the way for future immersive exhibits that bring history to life. Journey establishes a new standard for innovation in museums by combining historical artefacts with cutting-edge technology.

### Immersive storytelling

**Eleanor Greenleaf**, senior creative at Journey, says: “When we were approached to be a part of the British Museum pilot project, we leant on our expertise at Journey as multidimensional designers, to reimagine how museum goers could engage with large exhibits or series of artifacts in new ways. Our mission was to bring the human stories of the British Museum’s unparalleled objects to life, inspiring a new generation of visitors.

“Leveraging our expertise in sound, motion, and narrative design strategy, we translated the exhibits’ histories into captivating experiences that guide the visitors toward a deeper connection. Through immersive storytelling, spoken word and short format reels we help the visitor to have a more intimate connection with these extraordinary pieces of history.

“We’ve ensured that all content engages visitors on multiple levels too, to ultimately make it appeal to the broadest

possible audience.”

**Stuart Frost**, head of interpretation at The British Museum, says: “It is clear that the digital projection animating the Lion Hunt Reliefs – and the accompanying soundscape – has transformed the way visitors engage with the sculptures in this part of the Assyrian Galleries. The projection has significantly increased the attracting and holding power of the displays.

“We often see visitors filming the projection on their phones, and on one occasion, I’ve even observed everyone watching the animation spontaneously applaud at the end of the sequence.”

**John Blanchard**, principal and director of RAA’s London studio, adds: “We are honored to have worked with the British Museum once more for the experimental Pilot Projects. In-gallery prototyping is transforming how institutions approach the design process, creating a dynamic bridge between designers, curators and audiences. This method embeds the narrative in real-time, fostering collaboration as interpretation evolves.

“By exchanging ideas and testing concepts directly within galleries, we can refine, reimagine and elevate design responses to ensure every voice, story and history resonates deeply — both emotionally and intellectually — with visitors. It’s a process that not only shapes the experience but also amplifies its impact.”

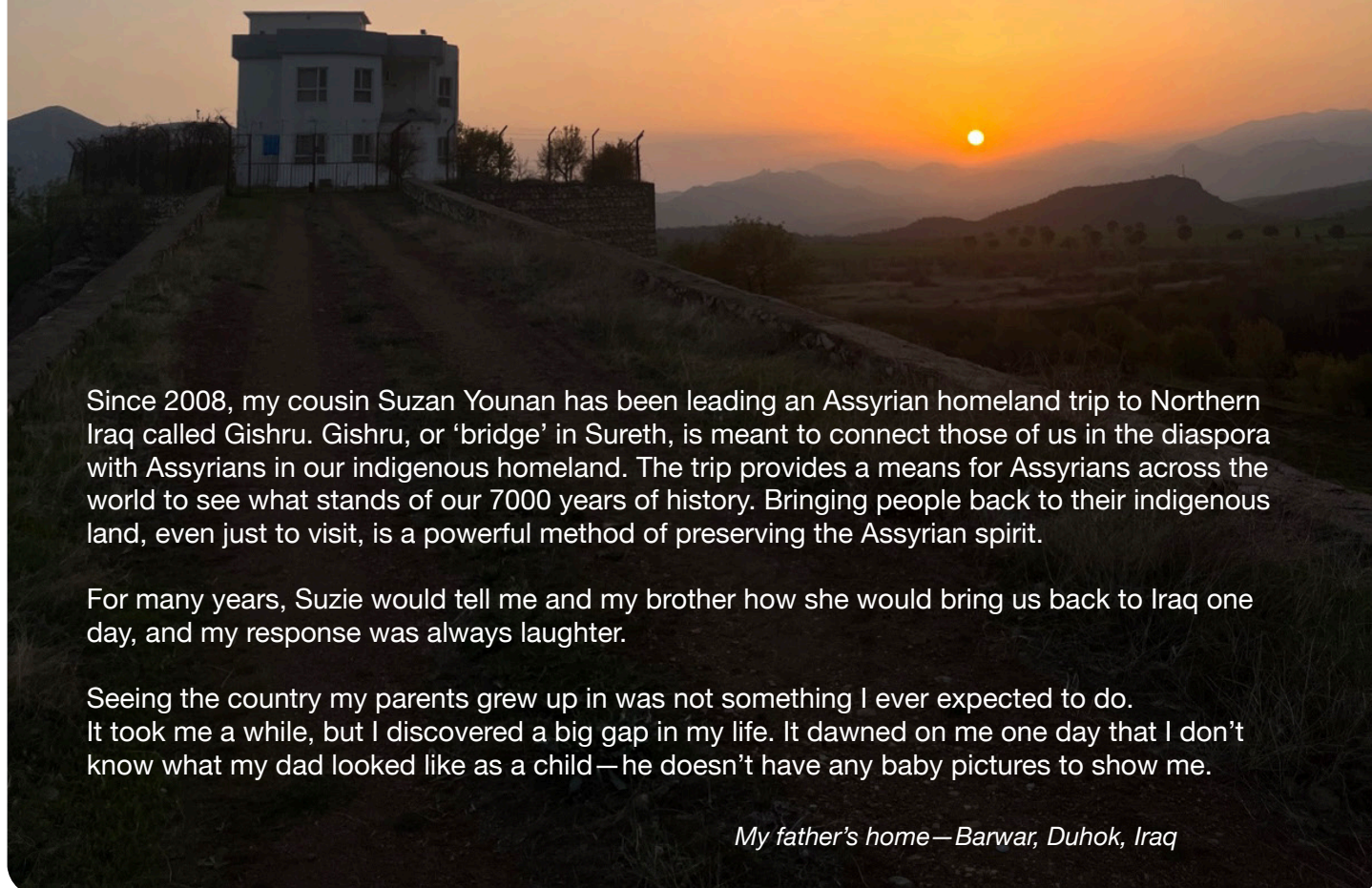
Last year, Journey announced the acquisition of the story-driven design leader 59 and the creative technology firm VMI Studio.



*The Vindolanda tablets at the British Museum. Exhibition Design by Ralph Appelbaum Associates (RAA). Immersive exhibits by Journey. Photography courtesy of Journey. Photographer Alberto Romano*

# Baba's House

By Deena Shamiran Sada



Since 2008, my cousin Suzan Younan has been leading an Assyrian homeland trip to Northern Iraq called Gishru. Gishru, or 'bridge' in Sureth, is meant to connect those of us in the diaspora with Assyrians in our indigenous homeland. The trip provides a means for Assyrians across the world to see what stands of our 7000 years of history. Bringing people back to their indigenous land, even just to visit, is a powerful method of preserving the Assyrian spirit.

For many years, Suzie would tell me and my brother how she would bring us back to Iraq one day, and my response was always laughter.

Seeing the country my parents grew up in was not something I ever expected to do. It took me a while, but I discovered a big gap in my life. It dawned on me one day that I don't know what my dad looked like as a child—he doesn't have any baby pictures to show me.

*My father's home—Barwar, Duhok, Iraq*

*Delale Bridge—Zakho, Duhok, Iraq*



*Assyrian Martyrs Memorial  
Gunda Kosa, Duhok, Iraq*



My parents' childhoods feel far away, like a world I can never reach. Their stories are like tales or scenes from a movie. There were no toys or clothes they could pass down to me. The stark difference between my youth and theirs was always something I had to be grateful for; they struggled and worked to give me a life better than their own. I was never brave enough to admit that behind my gratitude was an unspoken sadness, a sense of disconnect. The space between my world and theirs felt big and vast, and in it, something intangible but important was lost.

I love my parents. We want to know all about the people we love. Amongst many others, this was a reason I wanted to visit the homeland. When I saw the home my dad ran around as a child, I felt close to him in a way that I was always searching for. Seeing his stories come to life shrank that space and bridged that gap.

I explain to my parents that despite their deterrence from their home country and bitter memories, my desire to be there only grows—not for comfort or pleasures, but to feel close to them. My heart will always long to see more of them and the worlds they taught me about; nothing will ever soothe or rid me of that longing.

They are the roots of my culture, my understanding of myself; this is the part of me that I don't choose, that I was born with, that defines my history and my future. My mom and dad are the pillars of my identity; I want to know everything, see everything, and feel everything that they did. And so, I went.

*What did I see?*

*What did I learn?*

*What did I find?*

*What is left of us?*

I found a broken nation of unbreakable people. Assyrians living in Northern Iraq have survived

generations of government corruption, religious persecution, genocide, land grabbing, and high-level discrimination.

The question we in the diaspora ask ourselves is: why are they still there? Do they want to leave? Should we help them leave? You can imagine my surprise when I got to Assyria to discover a wounded group of people with an unwavering willingness to die for their land.

*"We don't want you to help us leave, we want you to help us stay."*

The willingness to die, the denial of self, is everywhere: in our martyrs, our organizations, and most strikingly, our youth. I found a people—just like me in talk and walk—but fundamentally different in strength and faith. I have so many meaningless things that I live for; they have one meaningful thing, and they would die for it.

What would I die for? Would I die for the land that connects me to my mother and father? Being met with that kind of strength is overwhelming, unforgettable. Are we in diaspora capable of giving up everything for the survival of our people? Are we capable of giving up anything at all?

The roots of our history are not enough. Assyrians are more than just history. Our presence today holds greater significance. The medicine for the sickness of diaspora is preservation. Our people are practicing this in our homeland, and it is our job to go see them, acknowledge them, support them. Historical roots become obsolete with no commitment to future growth. Community engagement is what keeps us alive. I will keep going back. I will keep connecting with our people in Assyria. I will keep praying to soak up their wisdom, their courage, and their bravery. And I will pray every day for my brothers and sisters in diaspora to join me.

*For those interested in seeing Assyria, seeing our history and our people in their rightful home, please visit [www.gishru.com](http://www.gishru.com)*



*During a Mass at the Mariamite Cathedral in Damascus (Syria) on December 22, 2024, a few days before Christmas and after the fall of dictator Bashar al-Assad. MOHAMMED AL RIFAI / EFE/MAXPPP*

February 7, 2025  
 Courtesy of: La Croix

*Translation from French into English  
 by Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.*

## "The Syria of tomorrow must integrate its neglected Christian historical heritage."

*Joseph Yacoub<sup>1</sup> – Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the Catholic University of Lyon, specialist in Eastern Christians and Assyro-Chaldeans\*.*

**Joseph Yacoub, a specialist in Eastern Christians, revisits the historical construction of Syrian identity and how it has long sidelined the country's Christian history. After the overthrow of the Assad regime by HTC, Syria's unity will depend on the recognition of its plurality.**

Now that Syria has freed itself from the tyrannical Assad regime and the Islamist organization Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham (HTC) has taken its place, everyone is in a state of uncertainty. Ravaged by chaos and disorder, fragmented into multiple local powers, with millions of Syrians scattered abroad and many others displaced, the Syria of tomorrow raises many questions. So much so that one wonders what could restore its unity and reclaim its sovereignty.

First of all, what is Syria? Is it truly a homogeneous entity? An Arab-Muslim country, as it is often portrayed, or simply Syrian? As the gateway to the East and a crossroads of trade routes, its geographical configuration is crucial in understanding its history and the enduring attraction it has held for conquerors. A place of encounters, passage, and conflicts, Syria was originally inhabited by the Canaanites and Arameans, who left a significant imprint on its identity. Aramean kingdoms flourished throughout the region. On this subject, one only needs to read the Bible.

But since antiquity, Syria has never known peace and stability. Numerous conquerors have succeeded one another, each leaving lasting scars. It is a society where a diversity of ethnic, religious, and sectarian communities has always coexisted, yet never entirely free from conflict.

Let us recall that Syria was a major cradle of Christianity before Rome, home to the first apostolic churches (Syriac, Nestorian, Melkite, Maronite, Byzantine...), a key center of Greco-Roman history, of Aramaic-Syriac culture, and later of the Arab-Muslim world. The latter was fundamentally shaped by Islam's connection to the Umayyad period (650–750). Though brief, this era profoundly influenced Syria, giving it a distinctly Arab character, in contrast to the Abbasid period in Baghdad. These foundational elements have all contributed to the country's historical fabric.

### A History Neglected by Islamists

But this history, as rich as it may be, has long been neglected by Arab nationalism and Islamist movements. Yet, its spirit is reflected in its literature, highlighted by archaeologists and historians, particularly the French. During the Greco-Roman conquest, Syria achieved great things, producing globally renowned figures such as Iamblichus of Emesa-Homs, who taught philosophy at the school of Apamea-Afamia. At that time, Syria gained an international reputation. Syrian elites were drawn to Greek language and culture. Greek became an intellectual language in the East, coexisting with Aramaic and even influencing it. Nevertheless, Aramaic survived and fostered a diverse and rich literary tradition, centered in Edessa/Urfa.

There were also both pagan and Christian scholars coexisting. Antioch, a cosmopolitan city, produced Libanius, whose student was the Christian John

Chrysostom. Syria also gave Rome several emperors and popes. The country sent multiple bishops to the Council of Nicaea (325), whose 1,700th anniversary is being commemorated this year. Syria was also at the heart of the theological debates that led to Christological controversies and so-called "heresies."

### A Confused Mixture of Syrian and Arab Identity

However, due to their systematic push for Arabization, Syrian governments have often failed to grasp the true identity of Syria and to develop a long-term vision for the country. In the past, the passionate and confused blending of "Syrian" and "Arab," without a clear definition and without clarifying its connection to political Islam, has led to the mutilation of Syria's national and religious identity. This confusion has blurred the sense of belonging, resulting in numerous revolts and the exodus of populations, particularly Christians. Throughout the 20th century, Syria's history remained tumultuous. At the beginning of this century, tensions have drastically worsened, and grievances have deepened with the civil war (2011–2024).

Are We Going to Repeat the Same Mistakes Today? As the country stands on the brink of political transformations that everyone is anticipating, it is crucial to reflect on its recent past. Visionary in his thinking, the Syriac Catholic Patriarch, Mgr. Ignace Ephrem II Rahmani, traveled to Paris in 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, to present the demands of his compatriots. He strongly advocated for an authentic Syrian nationality, which, he repeatedly emphasized, was distinct from that of Arabia. Will the country be capable of adopting a long-term vision? Will it learn from these painful experiences? What will be done with its non-Arab and non-Muslim heritage? Will Syria continue to refer solely to Islam and the Arab period, or will it embrace the full depth of its history?

A new phase for Syria is beginning. It would be unfortunate if the future Syrian leaders were to overlook such a rich heritage. Whatever form the Syrian state takes tomorrow, it is essential to amend the constitutional framework, which currently suffers from an excess of Arab nationalism and Islam, in order to incorporate Syrian civilization as a whole. This includes adding Syriac as a national language, alongside Arabic. Such a change necessitates a revision of educational curricula, integrating Eastern Christianity on an equal footing with Islam. This is where the real challenge lies.

*(1) Latest published work, co-authored with Claire Yacoub: Deux Chrétiens d'Orient en Gaule. Jacques d'Assyrie et Abraham d'Euphrate, Éd. Lacour, Nîmes, 2024.*

\* Assyro-Chaldeans is the phrase used in French to represent Assyrians of all denominations.



## Pioneering Assyrian Women Celebrated in Digital Exhibition by University of Dayton Students

By Jawad Al-Samarraie  
Courtesy of [www. IraqiNews.com](http://www.IraqiNews.com)

*Interactive digital exhibition celebrating the lives and contributions of pioneering Assyrian women of the 20th century.*

Ohio (IraqiNews.com) – The University of Dayton has announced the success of two of its students, Charlotte Capuano and Irene Pinto, in creating a groundbreaking digital exhibition highlighting the lives of pioneering Assyrian women of the 20th century. The project, designed for the Syriac Heritage Museum in Iraq, showcases the impactful contributions of four remarkable women: Maria Theresa Asmar, Surma Khanum, Maryam Nirama, and Lillie Taimoorazy. This initiative underscores the university's commitment to cultural preservation and global engagement.

**A digital tribute to Assyrian women pioneers**  
Capuano and Pinto's focus on the influential roles of Assyrian women in their communities, particularly within the Chaldean Church and broader Middle Eastern society. These women were not just cultural icons; they were trailblazers whose efforts resonated nationally and regionally. By leveraging advanced tools like ArcGIS Story Maps, the students crafted an interactive narrative that breathes life into history.

**The stories of four remarkable women**  
The exhibition dives deep into the lives of four extraordinary figures:

- **Maria Theresa Asmar:** A celebrated writer and activist whose memoirs shed light on the Assyrian experience.
- **Surma Khanum:** A leader known for her advocacy within the Assyrian Church.
- **Maryam Nirama:** A social reformer who worked tirelessly for the upliftment of women in her community.

- **Lillie Taimoorazy:** An environmentalist and cultural icon famously dubbed the “Mother of Assyrian Folk Dance.”

Through archival documents and rare photographs, the exhibition offers a profound look at their struggles and accomplishments.

**A collaborative effort fueled by innovation**  
The digital exhibition was developed during the Spring 2024 semester under the mentorship of Dr. Alda Benjamen, a history professor with extensive experience in cultural heritage preservation. Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with the Alliance for Cultural Heritage (Antiquities Coalition), this initiative received substantial support, including a \$1 million grant. The grant supports the development of educational programming for the minority communities and includes funding for UD student interns to participate in the ongoing digitization efforts.

After completing their coursework, the students continued their work through a summer fellowship program supported by the university's College of Arts and Sciences. Guided by



University of Dayton library staff, they utilized innovative tools to create a rich, interactive experience.

**Cultural preservation through digital storytelling**  
The project serves as a bridge for displaced Assyrian communities, reconnecting them with their rich heritage. The violence and turmoil in Iraq have led to the loss of many culturally significant sites. This exhibition, hosted virtually, allows these communities to rediscover and celebrate their history.

**Lillie Taimoorazy: The queen of folkloric culture**  
One of the standout stories in the exhibition is that of Lillie Taimoorazy. Known for her dedication to preserving Assyrian cultural traditions, Taimoorazy's work in environmental activism and folk dance has left an indelible mark. The exhibition highlights her contributions through rare, previously unseen photographs and family-provided artifacts, including traditional dance costumes and music compositions.

**Family involvement: A treasure trove of heritage**  
One of the most remarkable aspects of the project was the active involvement of the families of these pioneering women. Pinto and Capuano were granted access to invaluable resources, including personal writings and photographs. These contributions enriched the exhibition, providing an intimate glimpse into the lives of these

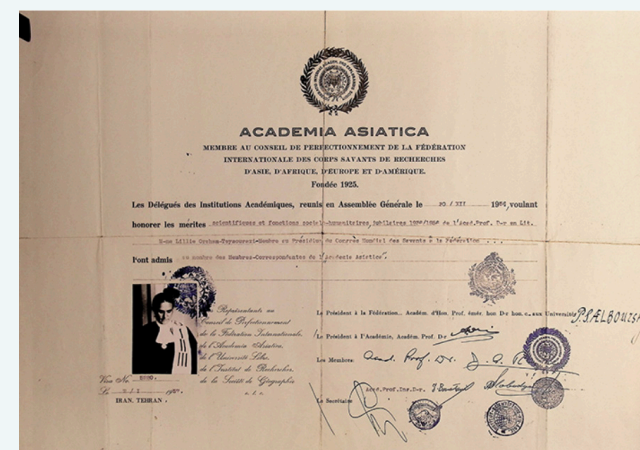
historical figures.

**A global academic connection**  
Dr. Benjamen emphasized the importance of personal and academic connections in cultural heritage preservation. With over a decade of experience conducting research in Iraq, she noted the immense satisfaction of involving students in meaningful, globally significant projects.

**Exhibition launch and future prospects**  
The digital exhibition was adapted for multilingual audiences and launched in Erbil in July 2024. Plans are underway to expand the project, ensuring that it remains accessible and continues to inspire future generations.

**Conclusion**  
The University of Dayton's digital exhibition on Assyrian women pioneers stands as a testament to the power of storytelling and the importance of preserving cultural heritage. By showcasing the lives of these remarkable women, the project not only celebrates their legacy but also bridges gaps between displaced communities and their roots. It's a shining example of how academic initiatives can make a meaningful global impact.

*ALL PHOTOS from the exhibit organized by Charlotte Capuano and Erin Pinto for the Syriac Heritage Museum in Iraq. Photos courtesy of the Lillie Taimoorazy Archives.*



## Discover 4,000 Years of Culinary Tradition Through a Family's Recipes in a New Cookbook



By Ramsen Shamon  
Deputy Opinion Editor, Newsweek

Cookbooks, like memoirs and nonfiction novels, provide vital insight on how humans do what they do best—live their lives. The passing down of recipes, whether written or unwritten, is as old as time. A new cookbook, *The Oldest Kitchen in the World*, honoring one of the oldest cuisines in the world—Assyrian cuisine—highlights how ancient and unique this Middle Eastern gastronomy is and grants anyone the opportunity to enjoy over 4,000 years of rich culinary history in their very own kitchen.

Newsweek's Ramsen Shamon interviewed the cookbook's author, Matay DeMayee, about the process of compiling his illiterate mother Smuni Turan's recipes in hopes of safeguarding her cooking for generations to come. They discussed some of DeMayee's favorite recipes, while also addressing the dark chapters of modern Assyrian history mentioned in the cookbook.

Assyrians are Indigenous to the Middle East and have been persecuted throughout their contemporary history due to their distinct ethnic identity and Christian religion. This historical family cookbook shares a matriarch's story of leaving her homeland for Europe, while showcasing the originality of Assyrian cooking to the world—a cuisine that is seldom if ever given any attention on the international stage but has always been the blueprint for other cuisines. The time is ripe to celebrate and pass on Assyrian cooking with *The Oldest Kitchen in the World*, an essential addition to any kitchen. You can pre-order *The Oldest Kitchen in the World: 4,000 Years of Middle Eastern Cooking Passed Down through Generations (A Cookbook)* at Barnes & Noble.

**Q\_ Why did you decide to make *The Oldest Kitchen in the World*?**

A\_ It's an introduction to the culture and history of the Assyrians, also known as Syriacs, Chaldeans, or Arameans. Our culture is very rich and comprehensive. Did you know that agriculture first developed in our homeland between the rivers of Tigris and Euphrates and the art of cooking almost immediately followed? But our history is also tragic, and unfortunately unknown to many people. In my cookbook, I share, through a large selection of delicious recipes, not only the culinary, but also the cultural and intellectual wealth of the people who've lived in the Middle East since ancient times—the people of our family.

**You feature the ancient Akkadian words for ingredients along with the modern words used by Assyrians today. How hard or easy was it to find the words of ingredients in Akkadian—one of the earliest languages spoken in Mesopotamia?**



*"The Oldest Kitchen in the World" is seen. Courtesy of Emma Peijnenburg, Claire Witteveen, and Daan Heijbroek*

A strong knowledge of the modern Aramaic dialects (spoken *Surayt/Sureth*), Syriac (especially reading literary Syriac) is required to navigate through the Akkadian dictionaries and to link the Akkadian words for certain ingredients to our modern Aramaic dialects. This proved to be a difficult and time-consuming part of writing this book.

Akkadian was gradually replaced by Aramaic, a dialect of which my mother and I speak and is presumed to be the language spoken by Jesus Christ. Aramaic adopted many words for recipes, ingredients, and techniques from ancient Akkadian.

**Your mother's recipes and life are beautifully highlighted in the cookbook. Which is your mother's favorite recipe and why?**

Stuffed wheat pouches, *kötle*, filled with minced meat and finely chopped onions and parsley. Brushed in beaten eggs and fried. It holds a special place in our [Assyrian] tradition as it is a popular and beloved dish that is often prepared for special occasions and family gatherings. Making the pouches requires time and nimble fingers, a kneading technique that she learned from her mother.

**Which is your favorite recipe?**

*Kleicha*, light, crunchy spice cookies. It is my favorite childhood cookie. These cookies are enjoyed especially during Easter and Christmas, when people bake them in vast quantities.

**Which recipe is the easiest to make for those who don't cook much? And which is the most difficult?**



The cookbook author's mother Smuni Turan is seen. The recipes featured in "The Oldest Kitchen in the World" were passed down throughout the generations. Courtesy of Emma Peijnenburg, Claire Witteveen, and Daan Heijbroek

There are many easy dishes such as bulgur, salads, one-pot dishes, a lemony red lintel soup, or juicy orange almond semolina cake. Kötle, is the most difficult, these seemingly simple stuffed dough pouches require significant concentration and practice.

Smuni Turan and children are pictured. Courtesy of Emma Peijnenburg, Claire Witteveen, and Daan Heijbroek

**Which dish should every Assyrian learn how to make?**

Easter is the most significant and oldest celebration for the Assyrian people. Naturally, good food and drink are integral. For my mother, this is the busiest time of the year. She makes everything herself, from yogurt and cheese to braided soft sweet rolls.

The most important dish to learn is [how to bake]

bread, as there is no meal that is not accompanied by a slice of it. Traditionally bread was baked in a *tanuro*, a communal oven made from mud clay—an oven that's been the same for thousands of years. It's shaped somewhat like a giant beehive, and houses a wood fire. It has a small hole at the bottom for airflow and a larger one at the top for access. When the fire is reduced to smoldering embers, bread dough is adhered to the oven's inner walls. The result is *lahmo doe tanuro* (bread from the oven), a bread with a light texture.

**Which dish do you enjoy making with your mom the most?**

*Maqloubeh*. The name translates to "flipped over." It is a savory upside-down pie, bursting with herbs and spices. The preparation is straightforward, except for the very last part—flipping the pie onto a plate. This needs to be done in one swift move, and you only get one chance to get it right. This event always stirs much excitement and both my mother and I want to see if the *maqloubeh* keeps its shape. If it doesn't, you would see the disappointment on our faces. But usually it goes well, and then we are very happy.

Cookbook author Matay DeMayee is pictured with his mother Smuni Turan. Courtesy of Emma Peijnenburg, Claire Witteveen, and Daan Heijbroek

**What was the most important thing you learned from your mom while making The Oldest Kitchen in the World?**

The most important thing I learned was that my mother told me stories I'd never heard before. Stories about her childhood, the way she lived in Tur Abdin [modern Turkey], the way her family survived in a hostile world, and of course the way she cooked. So making this book was not only fun, but also moving and revealing.

Naturally it helps that we get along very well, especially in the kitchen. Cooking and telling stories simply go very well together. My mum is as good a listener as she is a storyteller. Maybe that's enhanced by the fact that she can't read nor write. It's probably the beautiful side of illiteracy. All her stories and recipes have been passed on orally for centuries. And so I heard, while writing down the recipes, many old and new stories. And I learned much more about myself and our history.

**One of your relatives, Semun Hanne Haydo Turan, was highlighted in the book as a hero during the Assyrian genocide during the early part of the 20th century. Does an English language book exist about him? How can we learn more about his life?**

There is an English translation of Kemal Yalcin's book on Semun Hanne Haydo, my great-grandfather,



who was a hero of the resistance. During the horrors of the Sayfo, the 1915 genocide by the Ottoman Empire, around the time of the first World War, he and his brother Malke protected as many people as possible and prevent attacks on entire villages such as Sare and Bsorino.

Eventually, my Christian great-grandfather was taken prisoner. He and a friend, who was Muslim, executed a daring escape from the prison by tying blankets together and jumping out of a high window. They concealed themselves in the tall wheat and corn in the fields and survived. He passed away much later in 1964. Later this year his memorial in Tur Abdin will be revealed, including the screening of a documentary film that will be released.

We will be looking forward to viewing that documentary. This book reminded me of how much Assyrian culture and traditions have been lost over time due to genocide, war, and displacement. What can communities in diaspora do to maintain their culture and pass it on to future generations?

Language is a key identity marker. Assyrians must endeavor to keep their language alive through

speech and education. If diaspora fails in this respect, they should at the very least record their language. Assyrians can also educate fellow Assyrians on their identity, their culture and traditions, and try to build strong institutions (churches, schools, cultural centers) to safeguard and celebrate the Assyrian heritage for future generations. Culture gets passed and lives on through food. That's also one of the reasons why I wrote this book. As our culture is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future and many stories and recipes are transmitted orally from one generation to another, I'd like to stress the importance of documentation so it will be maintained, especially when this is firsthand information or experience. I hope I've contributed through this book.

**What does your mom hope for the future?**

Democracy, equal rights, and protection of Indigenous Peoples and minorities, in the Syriac-Assyrian-Aramean-Chaldean peoples' home countries of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, Iran, and Jordan. We have become a minority people in our home countries with atrocities and policies of



Cookbook author Matay DeMayee is pictured. Courtesy of Emma Peijnenburg, Claire Witteveen, and Daan Heijbroek

exclusion. She hopes that our endangered culture and language will be preserved.

**After leaving for Europe, your mother visited her village only once. Will she visit it again?**

After 35 years she returned to her birth village Sare [in modern Turkey], once, during summer in 2007. She stayed at her ancestral home, which was rebuilt by her brother and nephew. It was hot and she slept outside on the flat rooftop of the house. She visited ancient monasteries such as Mor Gabriel and Dayr al-Zafaran. She dried grapes to make raisins and enjoyed delightful meals at a restaurant overlooking the border with Syria. She savored wine from the winemaker, who maintains the tradition of producing Assyrian wine.

Yet, she was also very saddened—most of the houses in her village were destroyed, and hardly anyone lived there anymore. The majority of people had been driven away, most Christians had left, and

much of the culture had consequently been lost. They've become ghost towns.

Our plan is to go together soon, my first time, as she is still alive. She'd be my best guide. My mum's nephew Fikri Turan still lives in her birthplace Sare and never left. My uncle, who lives in the Netherlands, rebuilt the house my mother grew up in. My mum will not return back to the homeland unless it's with me. But there are certainly individuals here in the Netherlands who return back, invest in property, or choose to be buried there.

**What other projects can we look forward to?**

More international translations of our book will be published, and we've been contacted by a TV director who believes our cookbook and story reads like a movie; they recently recorded a promo with us for a potential TV series or documentary. The most excited project I am looking forward to is visiting Tur Abdin, the land of my ancestors and see what is left of the house of my parents. A place I can't easily go to and hardly know, but I'd like to discover what traces are left of our people and culture. I'd like to travel to small villages in the region and ask the locals how they cook and learn more about the ingredients they use. I am curious if the taste of their cooking is familiar to the kitchen of our people that live in diaspora. This may be inspiration for a new book. I hope they'll tell me about a dish or about a tradition, and open their hearts and their recipes and tell their stories and secrets. This could be historic documentation. I'd like to promote this cuisine, so people know about the Assyrians.

**Any final thoughts?**

My favorite cookbooks not only contain recipes, but also compelling photography and are full of stories—well explained, within a context. This way you are often introduced to a whole new world. Writers such as Claudia Roden and Nigel Slater are masters at this. You are truly drawn into their kitchen and world of thought. I love that, you immediately feel like getting started. I hope my cookbook will have these qualities, too.

Portions of this interview were edited for clarity.

[Share on Twitt](#)

Ramsen, a Chicago native of Assyrian heritage, is a deputy opinion editor at Newsweek.

# Celebrating Akitu 6775: A Vibrant Start to the Assyrian New Year in Iraq!



Akitu, the Assyrian New Year, is one of the oldest and most beautiful traditions, and it was celebrated in full swing this year in Iraq. On April 1, 2025, the streets of Duhok were alive with color, music, and joy as locals and visitors gathered to mark the beginning of spring and the start of a fresh year. It wasn't just any celebration—it was a powerful reminder of Assyrian heritage and community spirit!

**A Celebration of Culture and Unity**

The day began with a lively parade that brought together people of all ages. It started at the Virgin Mary Church in downtown Duhok, and as the parade made its way through the city, you could feel the excitement building. Traditional Assyrian music filled the air, and people waved flags while dressed in stunning, colorful costumes. It was like a big family reunion where everyone came together to honor their roots and the land they call home.

At the Mazi Complex, the real fun began! There were traditional dances, performances, and people sharing stories about their history. It was more than just a festival; it was a deep connection to the past and a celebration of how far Assyrians have come.

**A Nod to the Past, A Look to the Future**

Akitu isn't just about the festivities—it's a reminder of the resilience and strength of the Assyrian people. The festival has been celebrated for thousands of years, and it continues to bring the community together. It represents a fresh start, new beginnings, and the hope that every year will be better than the last.

As we danced and laughed, it was clear: the spirit of the

Assyrian people is unbreakable. Whether you're from Iraq or the Assyrian diaspora, there's something powerful about coming together to celebrate this day.

**A Little Challenge, But We Stand Strong**

Of course, no celebration is without its challenges. Sadly, there was an incident during the parade when a man attacked a few people. Fortunately, the situation was quickly handled, and everyone is safe. But even with this hiccup, the message of the day remained strong: no matter what, we stand together, stronger than ever.

The festival continued to shine brightly, and it became a testament to the unity of the Assyrian community. There were smiles, laughter, and love filling the air, despite any setbacks.

The day was full of heartfelt messages of unity and pride. Leaders like Ninos Odisho reminded everyone that this celebration isn't just about looking back; it's about looking forward to a future where Assyrian culture and traditions continue to thrive. President Nechirvan Barzani also sent his warm congratulations, celebrating the cultural richness that Akitu brings to the Kurdistan Region, Northern Iraq. It was a day of joy, and a reminder that we all have a part to play in protecting and nurturing our cultural heritage.

Akitu 2025 was a blast—a day to remember and a perfect example of the power of community. As we look to the future, we can't wait to keep the traditions alive and share them with the world. Let's keep dancing, laughing, and celebrating, because the Assyrian spirit is alive and well!



# Christian Minorities in Syria: What Future After Assad's Fall?

By Simta Malki and Valériane Laumonier - Courtesy of Journal L'Attitude

Syria, a country rich in cultural heritage and abundant resources, has seen its history take a new turn over the past decade. In 2011, the country was struck by internal turmoil: the people rose up, groups were formed, and families were torn apart.

The country was divided among several factions with conflicting intentions. Part of the population rebelled against the Assad regime and its political party, the "Baath." This rebellion led to a civil war between those opposing the regime and those loyal to it. The Syrian opposition, led by the jihadist group HTS<sup>1</sup>, ultimately emerged victorious in these battles against Baath party loyalists in December 2024. Bashar al-Assad fled the country, and on December 8, 2024, the Syrian people declared the end of the authoritarian regime<sup>2</sup>.

Ahmed al-Charaa, a former jihadist who joined the opposition to the Assad regime in 2012, became the new president of Syria on January 29, 2025.

Recently, rebel brutality has begun to manifest in the form of massacres of members of various religious minorities. Despite Ahmed al-Charaa's claims that his party is secular, Syria's religious minorities remain at the mercy of a former HTS member—HTS having disbanded after securing the country's "freedom." The new Syrian president has already declared his intention to rewrite the Constitution and to respect the rights of ethnic minorities and women in the country.

Nonetheless, many Eastern Christians have perished in recent massacres, and the media far too often overlooks this significant minority in Syria. These people, who have contributed immensely to the nation's history and once made up nearly a quarter of the population, have seen their numbers drastically reduced.

What legacy will remain for future generations? Will they lose their traditions? What should Syria's Christian minorities expect now that the war is over? What are their fears and hopes?

To better understand the overall sentiment among Syrian Christians in the face of the current situation, we interviewed several of them.

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**Anonymous, 34 years old, Syria**

## **What does it mean to be a religious minority in Syria?**

"These past few days have been very difficult for us. This new government promises good things, but we are facing many extreme events. We're leaving the country day by day."

**How is al-Charaa compared to al-Assad?** "After what happened in the coastal region<sup>3</sup>, I think they're the same."

**What was life like for Christians before the civil war began?** "Before the war, 30% of the population was Christian. Now, it's around 10%. The period between 2014 and 2016 was very bad for Christians — we were their target, and I fear that it could happen again."

**What do you think about the country's future now that there's a new president?** "If he keeps a jihadist mindset, the future is dark."

**Do you think Christians were persecuted a lot before and after the war started?** "Before the war, we lived in peace. During the war, we went through terrible times."

**Gabriel, 21 years old, Belgium (since 2008)**

**What do you think of the current situation?** "It's worse than before. People were happy, but in my opinion, everything was premeditated. Joulani<sup>4</sup> was already known to the military, and overnight, he becomes president. Everyone was happy about Bashar's departure, but now, they regret their joy."

**What was life like under the Baath regime?** "If you owned a home and had a working family, it was enough to live on — but not enough to go on vacation. The cost of living was high, and the value of money was low. It was just the bare minimum. Also, there were no social benefits. Even though there were many jobs, you needed courage because it wasn't as developed as it is here. Finding a job after school wasn't easy. As you got older, you reached the point of mandatory military service. If you studied, you didn't have to do mandatory service. If you didn't study or failed your studies, you were forced to enlist. The length of military service was indefinite. This obligation didn't apply to women."

**What about your family still living in Syria?** "Some don't want to leave the country; others would like to. But it's still difficult to leave."

**Is there a future for Syria's Christian minorities?** "No, I

don't think so, because Syria has always been majority Muslim. Under Bashar, the climate was calm, but now a terrorist is in power, and the future is uncertain."

**What does Bashar al-Assad's departure mean to you?** "I feel bad for the members of my family who are still over there. Here, it doesn't affect me much."

**Anonymous, 44 years old, Belgium (since 2000)**

"I speak because I'm here, in Belgium. If I were in Syria, my words might be different. The Syrian people are right to be afraid. Here, we are protected — over there, they are not."

**What do you think of the current political situation in Syria?** "I supported Bashar's departure from the beginning because I didn't like his authoritarian regime. When he left, I was very happy. Now, the situation is unclear, but I remain hopeful because the new president took over a completely destroyed country. People expect him to rebuild everything in three months and blame him for not having done anything yet — but the country is in ruins."

**Would you like to live there again?** "To live there right now, no. It's not a good country compared to Belgium, and it will never reach the standard of living of European countries. I wouldn't want to go on vacation in Syria either, because there is no safety. Many armed criminals are at the edges of the cities. However, if security returns, I'd go back from time to time. For now, the country is like a school without a principal — the children play and do whatever they want, and no one respects any laws."

**How do you feel about having a former member of a jihadist group as president?** "I'm not worried. For me, it's still better than al-Assad. Under Bashar al-Assad, the army used to kidnap innocent people and lock them up. The prison of Saydnaya had many underground levels — for the sake of secrecy<sup>5</sup>."

**What's going to happen to Syria's Christians?** "Under al-Assad, many of us fled — even though he wasn't an Islamist and promoted secularism with some Muslim values, without being extreme. That proves he wasn't right for all Syrians."

**Do you think Christians were heavily wronged before and during the war?** "I don't think so, no. We were the most privileged people in Syria. We didn't go to war; we weren't trying to get involved in the conflict. The ones who were most persecuted were the Alawites and Shiites."

**We don't hear much about Christians over there — do you know why?** "Syrians are afraid; they don't dare speak

up, even those living in Belgium. Bashar al-Assad may be gone, but the trauma of authoritarianism remains. Life before the war was marked by the fear of saying anything against the president, for fear of being imprisoned."

**Anonymous, 59 years old, Belgium**

**What do you think of the current situation with the new president?** "For now, very little is clear. The former regime destroyed the country economically and morally. The country needs to be rebuilt, and right now, Syrians alone aren't capable of doing that. They need help from abroad. Of course, the Russians, Americans, Kurds, and others all have interests in Syrian territory, so it's a battleground for the time being. Still, I believe we're heading toward a civil state."

**Is it problematic that a former HTS member is leading the country?** "Ahmed al-Charaa has already changed a lot. When there's a complaint from the people, the state immediately listens. Let's not forget that he comes from a very Islamist group, even if he's 'modernizing.' In my opinion, he genuinely wants to establish justice and lift the country up. But if he doesn't keep his promises, the Syrians will rise up again."

**Is there a future for Syrian Christians?** "I'm optimistic at the moment, although under the rule of Hafez al-Assad<sup>6</sup>, Christians made up around 15%, and now they're down to just 5%."

**Do you think Christians were persecuted before and during the war?** "Christians lived well and celebrated religious holidays. During the war too. Of course, there were some exceptions because the country was unstable."

**Anonymous, 40 years old, Belgium (since 2018)**

**What was life like before the war?** "Life was pleasant — peace and security prevailed. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case for everyone. The middle class lived comfortably, but the underprivileged lived in poverty. After the war, life changed drastically: there's no longer any sense of safety — fear and panic have replaced it. Terrorism also emerged. People were afraid. In the morning, you'd wish your children a good day as they left for school, not knowing if they'd return."

On top of that, electricity and water were cut off during the day, which made people more aggressive and led some to steal or even commit crimes. Some took advantage of the situation by selling drinking water and electricity to make money. Merchants who ignored the financial hardship of Syrians exploited the crisis to get richer.

Government workers and public employees also faced severe financial difficulties because, during the war, salaries dropped to just \$20 per month. The U.S. dollar took over the market and the country's economy, triggering a financial crisis in Syria."

#### Were Christians the most impacted by the war?

"Christians were better off than they are now. They lived in peace. The Syrian regime didn't interfere in Christian life and left them to practice their beliefs and traditions. Even immigrants returning to the country to visit their loved ones felt safe. I can say that Christians have suffered greatly because they are a minority. Christians avoid conflict because their goal is to live in peace with everyone."

#### Weren't you afraid of Bashar al-Assad and his regime?

"No, because if you weren't against the regime, you had nothing to fear. Most Christians didn't get involved in politics and lived peaceful lives — very few of them were opposed to the regime."

**Do you think many Christians were massacred?** "As I said before, Christians were a minority, so the number of people killed was still significant. The period from 2014 to 2016 was the most difficult for Christians — ISIS committed many crimes. There were bombings in several cafés and other places. Also, people were kidnapped and are still missing to this day. These events created a state of panic within the Christian community. I'd also like to add that Christians received no outside support. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia never stopped supporting ISIS, whether financially or by providing weapons."

**What do you think of the new Syrian president?** "All we want is peace and safety, but this person followed the ideology of ISIS (Daesh). He has already committed criminal acts, so how can we trust someone like that? How can he lead the country and create an atmosphere of peace and serenity? Despite Assad's dictatorship, I'd rather live under his regime than risk having to live under Sharia law. In any case, he's in power now, and all we can hope is that he does his best for the good of the country. There are rumors that the new president is going to eliminate mandatory military service in Syria — I think that's a good thing. After all, soldiers are neither recognized nor respected, even though they risk their lives to protect the country and its people."

**Do you think immigrants will one day return to live in Syria?** "That's an important question. For Christians, living in an open and democratic society is essential — and that's what they've found in Western countries. There, they've rediscovered ambition and hope. They've experienced

safety and serenity — the joy of life, far from chaos and disorder."

**Do you think life would have been easier for you if you were Muslim?** "Muslims also suffered torture; they lost many people. The difference is that they are more numerous than Christians. That's why the losses among them are more visible. But they are no less victims of this war."

Following these testimonies, we see both positive and negative aspects regarding the former regime, as well as the current one. All that remains is to hope — for the Christian people and the rest of the population — that the new president honors his promises and good intentions to rebuild the country, so that the Christian heritage can flourish again, preserving the history and traditions of these lands.

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<sup>1</sup> HTS stands for Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, a jihadist militant group in Syria, formed in 2017 made up mainly of former al-Qaeda affiliates.

<sup>2</sup> The Assad family ruled Syria for over 50 years, adopting the Baath Party.

<sup>3</sup> Massacre of hundreds of Alawites on March 8 and 9, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Military name of Ahmed al-Charaa.

<sup>5</sup> Discovery of hundreds of prisoners in deplorable conditions inside secret underground facilities.

<sup>6</sup> Father of Bashar al-Assad and former president of Syria.



## California State Senate approves SCR22, recognizes Kha b'Nissan-Akitu as the New Year for Suraye

05/04/2025

**SACRAMENTO, United States** – In a historic nod to the cultural heritage of the Suraye (Assyrian-Aramean-Chaldean) people, the California State Senate has passed resolution **SCR22** recognizing Kha b'Nissan-Akitu as a celebrated New Year's holiday in the biggest state of the country. The resolution, introduced by [Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil](#) (D-Merced), received majority approval this week in Sacramento, affirming the first of April as Kha b'Nissan-Akitu and urging the preservation of the traditions, churches, and institutions of the Suraye (Assyrian-Aramean-Chaldean) people living in California. The proposal passed with 29 votes in favor and 11 abstentions.

In remarks before the Senate, Alvarado-Gil described Kha b'Nissan-Akitu as a celebration steeped in millennia of history. "This festival dates back thousands of years and represents the renewal of life, the beginning of spring, and the enduring spirit of a people who have withstood the tides of history," she said.

Observed from March 21 through April 1, Kha b'Nissan-Akitu marks the New Year and has long been celebrated in the homeland of Beth Nahrain (Mesopotamia) and by diaspora communities across the globe, including Iraq, Australia, and the United States. California, with one of the largest Suraye (Assyrian-Aramean-Chaldean) populations in the U.S., has become a hub for preserving and celebrating this cultural identity. Alvarado-Gil emphasized the enduring presence and

contributions of the Suraye communities in the state, particularly in Stanislaus County, where a vibrant and active population has established churches, civic organizations, and community centers.

"For decades, the Assyrian community has enriched our state through its deep cultural roots, its thriving businesses, and its leadership in civil society," the senator said. "This resolution is more than symbolic—it's a recognition of California's multicultural tapestry and a call to preserve the languages, customs, and histories that shape it."

#### Recognition amid cultural advocacy

The resolution arrives at a time when cultural preservation has taken on new urgency for Suraye and other indigenous peoples of the Middle East, many of whom have fled persecution and instability in their countries of origin. In California, the community has been instrumental in advocating for religious freedom, educational programs in native languages, and public awareness of their heritage.

The proposal now heads for potential discussion in the U.S. Senate, where supporters hope it will bolster efforts to recognize the Suraya diaspora on a national level.

For many, the recognition of Kha b'Nissan-Akitu is not merely a gesture, but a meaningful affirmation of identity in a country they now call home. As Senator Alvarado-Gil concluded in her speech, "This is a celebration not just of a new year—but of resilience, culture, and belonging."

# Rab-Emma Lazar Memoirs -July 1st 2024

Compiled By George Narso

This document illustrates the memoirs of Rab-Emma Lazar, which were passed on to me when I, along with two other friends (Singer Ogin Betshmucl (BetSamo) and Alan Osman), frequently visited him at his home in Modesto, California. Rab-Emma Lazar was one of the early men to join the Assyrian Levies as a Paratrooper and was possibly the first paratrooper ever in Mesopotamia (Iraq). Rab-Emma Lazar served in many WWII battles, which I will name below.

Rab-Emma Lazar was short in stature, with glowing green eyes, radiant red facial skin, and a mustache and eyebrows combed in a "V" shape depicting the eyes of an eagle. He was a very righteous man, feared by his enemies, challenged by his masters, instrumental and strategic, yet very simple—a tribal thinker, firm believer, and defender of the Assyrian Church of the East. He also loved playing the "Turkish Tambura" (a Turkish guitar that requires two players).

**Definition of Rank "Rab Emma":** Troop commander of a company of troops, consisting of 100–250 well-trained men assigned to a certain regiment. Levies were assigned a semi-automatic rifle, SMLE<sup>1</sup>, and Mark III Lee-Enfields. Rab-Emma Lazar served in many battles in Europe, namely the Battle of Normandy, the Liberation of Albania, the Liberation of Italy, and finally the Liberation of Cyprus, where the German commander surrendered to Rab-Emma Lazar's company.

In the Battle of Normandy, there were two companies of Assyrian Levies and two companies of Kurdish Levies. The

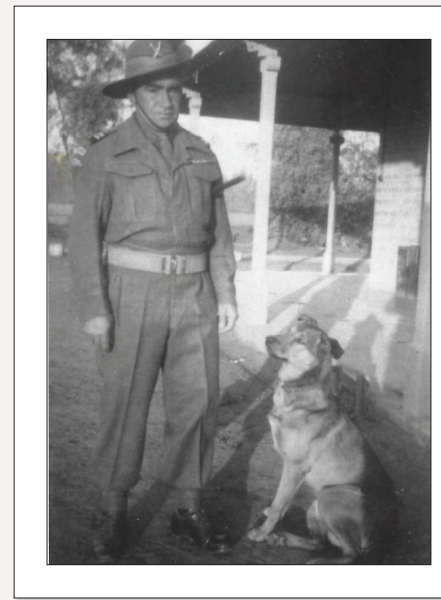
Kurdish companies were assigned to drop ropes so the Assyrian Levies could climb the hills occupied by heavy German machine gun positions overlooking the beaches. These positions were responsible for the killing of many Allied troops during their attempts to capture the beaches. When Rab-Emma Lazar and his company climbed the hills, he advised his troops to spread out and attack the German positions from the rear with hand grenades and rifles, thereby eliminating the threat.

In 1943, the Assyrian Levies also engaged in the Liberation of Italy.

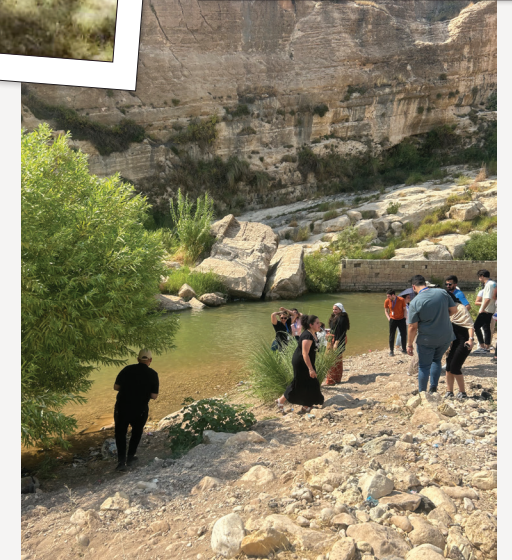
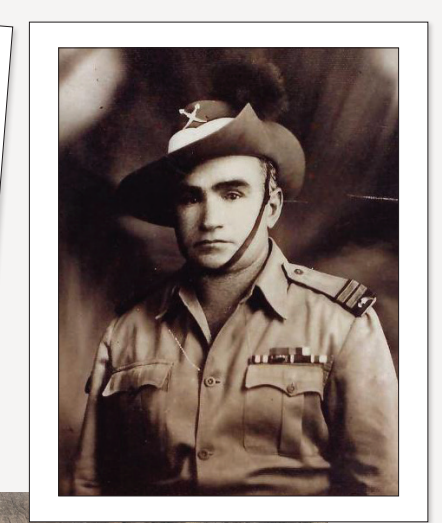
In 1944, the Assyrian Levies, including Rab-Emma Lazar and his company, were also on the front lines to liberate Albania, retaking it from the Italians under the command of Italian General Alfredo Guzzoni.

The most memorable battle was the Liberation of Cyprus in 1941, where the German commander surrendered directly to Rab-Emma Lazar and his company. Rab-Emma Lazar recounted this event many times. The German commander asked Lazar, "Where do you come from?" When Rab-Emma Lazar stated he was from Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), the German commander remarked that his battle experience was not of Arab origin. Rab-Emma Lazar replied that he and his company were not Arabs but Assyrians. This made the German commander laugh loudly, recalling Adolf Hitler's famous speech at the Reichstag in 1935.

Sir Thomas Edward Lawrence, better known as "Lawrence of Arabia," had a plan for the Assyrians in Mesopotamia.



Rab-Emma Lazar with the German shepherd dog he brought back from Italy.



He sought to force the Assyrians, mainly the mountain tribes, to leave their mountains and integrate into the newer Arab society, disbanding all their tribal heritages, traditions, faith, and language, which were all controlled and dominated by the Assyrian Church of the East. The massacre of Semele in 1933 was masterminded by Sir T.E. Lawrence and carried out by the Iraqi government with the support of Arab tribes, mainly from Fallujah.

Prior to the massacre, the British High Command dismantled the Assyrian Levies in regions near Semele and demanded that they surrender their weapons. Rab-Emma Lazar, being a strategist and analytic thinker, foresaw the British High Command's evil intentions. Instead of surrendering, he and other Assyrian Levies decided to move back to their villages with their weapons, knowing that the British Army could not reach them.

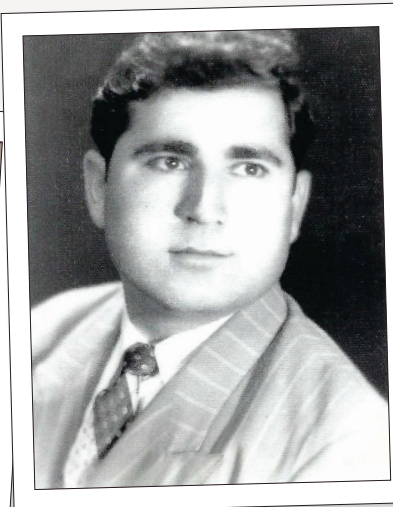
The night before the Semele massacre, Rab-Emma Lazar traveled to the village of Semele at night and kidnapped the priest's daughter, taking her to his village. He did this to prevent the priest's daughter from falling into the hands of Arab men, and he married her the following morning. Later in her life, she resided in Modesto, California.

According to Rab-Emma Lazar, he formed a small unit of renegade Levies to avenge the massacre of Semele. They attacked the police station involved in the massacre. When the battle started, the police officers realized that the Levies were better equipped, having rifles and a

machine gun. The chief of police and his officers surrendered to the Levies. Rab-Emma Lazar went to inspect the prisoners, mainly searching for the chief of police, who was hiding behind his officers. Rab-Emma Lazar, being short in stature, walked back and forth looking for him. Finally, he spotted him, grabbed him by his shirt collar, and pulled him to the front.

Rab-Emma Lazar took the chief of police and all the other officers to a hill overlooking the site of the massacre, where there was also a water stream or small river flowing nearby. This water stream has not dried up to this day. All the police officers, including the chief of police, were kneeling and executed, and their bodies were thrown into the water stream. Upon completing this mission, Rab-Emma Lazar and the rest of the Levies loaded their machine gun onto the back of a mule, crossed the river to the massacre site, and stated that they (the Levies) were soaked with the blood and body fats of the dead policemen.

1. SMLE refers to the *Short Magazine Lee-Enfield*, a bolt-action, magazine-fed, repeating rifle that served as the standard issue rifle of the British Empire and Commonwealth military forces during the first half of the 20th century, including World War I and World War II. The "short magazine" designation does not mean the magazine itself is shorter but rather that the rifle was shorter than earlier models, making it more versatile and easier to handle in various combat scenarios. It was known for its reliability, accuracy, and relatively fast rate of fire for a bolt-action rifle.





In Damascus, in December 2024, life resumes under the watchful eye of the rebels. Mohammad Yassine/L'Orient-Le Jour.

By Joseph YACOUB, February 4, 2025  
Courtesy of : L'Orient-Le Jour

Translation from French into English  
by Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.

## What Might the Syria of Tomorrow Look Like?

To understand the tensions, turbulence, and internal struggles shaking Syria, one must go back in time and embark on a journey through history—ancient, medieval, and contemporary—highlighted by key moments in the 5th, 7th-8th, 10th-12th, and 20th centuries.

One will notice that this country is characterized by pronounced ethnic and doctrinal, religious, and sectarian particularities, which resurface each time, contributing to its instability. Whether its Christianity—with an Eastern character—or its Islam—with an orthodox and distinctly Arab character—both have left a lasting mark on the country.

Furthermore, due to its geographical position, the local, regional, and international dimensions are interconnected. Syria has always been a focal point of competition—a constantly coveted land. Yesterday, it was Greco-Roman Syria, followed by the irreconcilable opposition between the Umayyads and the Abbasids, and today, it faces relentless struggles between major powers and neighboring countries.

Before Rome, Syria was a major cradle of Christianity

and home to several Aramean kingdoms (Damascus, Hamath, the Jazira...). A significant portion of the events mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of Paul and Peter took place in historical Syria. It was in this country that the first churches were born and structured, with their followers still actively present today. However, accusing each other of heresy, these churches spent centuries mutually condemning one another.

After the advent of Islam from Arabia, the Umayyads chose Damascus as the capital of the Empire (660–750). Though short-lived, this empire was prosperous and brilliant but constantly engaged in struggles with its adversaries, both in the Arabian Peninsula (Medina...) and in Iraq (Karbala, Kufa...), as well as internally. However, Baghdad eventually seized power from the Umayyads in 750, in a turbulent context that saw the Umayyads massacred by the Abbasids, who would become the new rulers for several centuries (750–1258).

However, the religious and political impact of the Umayyad Syrian period on the people, successive Syrian leaders, and popular imagination cannot be overstated, as it

has profoundly shaped mentalities over time. Syria became predominantly Sunni (currently 70% of the population), advocating for an integral Arabism, remaining faithful to its Umayyad ancestors who decreed the total Arabization of the country, finding in Islam and its civilization both a cultural and political foundation. Moreover, these ideas are widely embraced by the population, including many Christians who identify as Arabs and adhere to them. It is often said with pride: "Syria is the beating heart of Arabism." Conversely, Syrian Islam also gave rise to fundamentalist Islamic movements, including its own Muslim Brotherhood. From the Syrian perspective, Islam and Arabism are thus deeply intertwined—an originality that the country is keen to preserve.

Regarding Islam, one can mention Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), himself a Syrian, a renowned jurist and disciple of the theologian Ahmad ibn Hanbal. A relentless polemicist, he vigorously criticized sects within Islam. He was a literalist interpreter of the Quran and the Sunnah, a staunch defender of doctrinal intransigence, and hostile toward Christians and Jews, whom he labeled as polytheists and infidels. He was also an adversary of the Shiites, whom he considered more dangerous enemies than Jews and Christians. Speaking about the duties of Muslims, he wrote, "The representative of authority has as his primary duty to command all those under his rule to perform the prayers prescribed by God and to punish those who abstain from them. This duty is imposed upon him by the unanimous agreement of Muslims."

However, the same Syria also produced a great poet and writer with a skeptical mindset: Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri (973–1054).

The later period of the Abbasid Empire was highly turbulent. The Fatimids (Shiites, hostile to Sunnis), rivals of the Abbasids, proclaimed themselves the true caliphs of Islam. For two centuries, they established a caliphate in Egypt (969–1171) based in Fustat and built a new capital, Cairo (*the Victorious*). From Egypt, they extended their rule over Syria and Palestine. Under the Fatimids, Shiites, influenced by reformers, split doctrinally into several branches with notable differences. This period is crucial because it saw the emergence in Syria of the Alawites (Nusayris), Druze, and Ismailis—three offshoots of Shiism that faced persecution from orthodox Islam. From then on, sectarian divisions only intensified.

Does this not recall the divisions among early Christians: a Christian theocracy on one side, a Muslim theocracy on the other? Thus, the hunt for heretics began.

Indeed, many battles were waged against the Alawites. Considered pariahs, their history is sometimes tragic. In a *fatwa* described as "a very curious decision" by the orientalist René Dussaud, the previously mentioned jurist Ibn Taymiyya judged them to be even more infidel than idolaters and declared jihad against them permissible. He wrote, "This cursed religion has spread over a large part of Syria, and its followers are well known and notorious." Thus, it was deemed necessary to eliminate these unbelievers. In the name of traditional Sunni rigorism, he declared it unlawful to marry their women or to bury them in Muslim cemeteries. This persecution forced them to seek refuge in the mountainous region known as the Alawite Mountains, where they managed to survive the oppression.

Another Shiite group that faced persecution is the Ismaili community, established in Banyas, Qadmous, Masyaf,

and Salamiyah. Located not far from the Alawite Mountains, Salamiyah remains their main center today. Due to religious doctrines perceived as heretical by mainstream Islam, they lived in isolation within remote and difficult-to-access territories.

As for the Druze, their history begins in 1017, with Swaida (south of Damascus) as their capital, along with other towns to the north, such as Qanawat and Shahba. The Egyptian general Ibrahim Pasha attempted to subjugate them during his Syrian campaign (1832–1837) but failed. Like other ethnic and religious minorities, the Druze are deeply committed to their distinct identity and autonomy.

The 20th century was another defining moment in the destiny of this country. It was marked by constant turmoil and an intense struggle for power, which deeply shook the nation. Shortly after gaining independence on April 17, 1946, Syria experienced a series of coups d'état, continually plagued by instability and even anarchy. New political parties emerged, reflecting radically opposing nationalist ideologies—pan-Arabism and pan-Syrianism—as well as socialist, communist, and Islamic doctrines. At the same time, the military rose to prominence, composed mostly of individuals from rural backgrounds and the middle classes, including many from minority groups. Eventually, the role of political parties and the military became decisive in shaping the country's future.

Moreover, two books aptly reflect the prevailing mindset in the country. Édouard Saab, former editor-in-chief of the Lebanese daily *Le Jour*, later of *L'Orient-Le Jour*, and a correspondent for *Le Monde* in Beirut, published a book in Paris in 1968 with a telling title: *La Syrie ou la Révolution dans la Rancœur* (*Syria or the Revolution in Bitterness*).

In 1965, a British journalist and expert on Syria, Patrick Seale, published a book in London: *The Struggle for Syria: A Study in Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958*, offering an in-depth analysis of Syria's political struggles in the post-war period.

The first Syrian Constitution, enacted after independence and adopted in 1950, already stipulated that the Syrian people are part of the Arab nation by their history, present, and future. In the Constitution of March 12, 1973, the legislator simply affirmed that "the religion of the head of state is Islam" and that "Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is a principal source of legislation." Regarding national identity, Syria's pan-Arab character was explicitly stated: "The Syrian Arab region is part of the Arab homeland" and "the people in the Syrian Arab region are part of the Arab nation."

That being said, what is being prepared today? A new Constitution is being discussed, but what will its political philosophy and content be? Will it broaden the concept of the Arab nation? Will it introduce the notion of an Islamic nation? Or will it favor ethnic and religious diversity and political pluralism?

What, then, does the future hold? Syria's future lies in its diversity.

**Joseph Yacoub, Professor Emeritus of political science at the Catholic University of Lyon, author of numerous publications, and a specialist in Eastern Christians and Assyro-Chaldeans\*.**

\* *Assyro-Chaldeans* is the phrase used in French to represent Assyrians of all denominations.



By Dr. Julia Bajone Hallisy.

In my ongoing research of modern Assyrian history, I recently found *LET ME GET THERE*— a digital project created by Louis Takács to help visualize early 20th-century immigrant journeys. Takács has studied Anthropology, Philosophy, Information Science, and Learning Technologies, and works in communications for an NGO in the Netherlands. Louis has long been fascinated with immigration to the U.S., and ironically, his interest has only intensified since emigrating from the U.S. to the EU.

In 2017, Louis Takács began compiling what would amount to more than 20,000 public domain images extracted primarily from U.S. passport applications submitted at U.S. consular posts, circa 1904-1925. His online work features immigrants from over 50 countries and includes dozens of photos and emergency passport immigration applications from Assyrians and Armenians fleeing their homelands during the Seyfo era. The period between 1904 and 1925 was tumultuous in world history, a reality reflected in the collections. The material Takács has assembled comprises one of the largest and most diverse collections of U.S. migrant photos. The photos visually capture a time of shifting nationalities and global migration, a century of

change and motion in nations that would remain forever altered by geopolitical events beyond their control.

From *LET ME GET THERE*— “Between 1908 and 1923, approximately 10 million immigrants arrived in the United States. Two federally controlled immigration stations processed most of the arrivals: Ellis Island in New York and Angel Island in California.<sup>1</sup> Within the following ten years, more than one-third would return to their homeland, never to make the voyage to America again.”<sup>2</sup> The mass migration of the early 20th century includes stories, experiences, and challenges that are not only relevant a century later but are a timeless testament to the human spirit.

Since 1914, applicants have been required to include photos, which were affixed to multi-page passport applications. The U.S. National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) has kept most of the original applications or duplicates, and these collections serve as the source for the photos featured in this project. This enormous body of passport applications, many of which have photographs buried in them, has escaped the public

eye for decades but is now in the public domain and, since 2022, can be freely viewed via the online NARA catalog.

The photos and stories are an untapped reservoir of visual culture, and at least portions of the backstories behind the individuals in the frame are now able to be discovered. Takács's painstaking work (which included, in his words, “dogged research and a bit of luck”) provides us with supporting material – including names, destinations and travel routes, family members, names of people traveling together, and professions.

Takács explains his first encounter with the passport photos: “A few pages in (to the NARA folders) and I was quickly hooked; some portraits were so powerful that I couldn't look away. Others seemed like works of art, and I also thought that there was something powerful and inextinguishable in the subject's gaze- which was burning a hole in the camera lens... The unexpected beauty of the portraits can have a transcendent pull on the viewer, and it certainly did on me.”

I felt the same way looking at the photos. While the facial expressions resembled those we see of that era – little or no smile and a serious countenance - what I also saw was a visual depiction of resilience

and determination. Takács explains the Assyrian photo that captured his attention: “It was the face of Nonya Shabaz. Or at least her eyes...or something I couldn't put my finger on that reminded me of Arshile Gorky's portrait of his mother, who survived genocide but died of starvation in 1919.”

For me, the photos of Daisy Shimmon, Panna Eshoo, and Abner Nweeya Latchin proudly holding his infant son Robert were especially moving. Daisy Shimmon was only 10 years old and had been separated from her parents for several years. Daisy was applying for a passport with her aunt Shushan, who was acting as her guardian. Her face understandably shows fear but also a deep longing to be reunited with her parents. Panna Eshoo appears pensive but somehow serene, showing her resolve in her gently crossed arms. Abner Nweeya Latchin almost has a slight smile on his face. He emanates confidence that his family will escape harm and return to safety. The photos call out to the viewer not only to remember and mourn our devastating losses but to celebrate those who survived. As is common in Assyrian genealogical connections, Panna Eshoo appears in my family tree. I have looked at this part of my family many times over the past several years and now have a face to put with the name.



Nonya Shabaz, NARA Passport Photo/Shushan der Marderosian (Arshile Gorky's mother)  
© 2018 The Arshile Gorky Foundation / The Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

<sup>1</sup> Ellis Island primarily received immigrants from European, Middle Eastern, and Near Eastern territories, while Angel Island processed individuals from countries in Asia, primarily China and Japan. Other ports of entry include Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Los Angeles. Louis Takács.

<sup>2</sup> Wyman, Mark. 1996. *Round-trip to America: the immigrants return to Europe, 1880-1930*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 10.



Daisy Shimmon, NARA Passport Photo



Panna Eshoo, NARA Passport Photo

When I initially contacted Louis and inquired about the origin of the photographs, he shared a NARA album titled “Volume 144: Guatemala to Mexico.” I assumed he had sent me an incorrect link, but it turns out that there were Assyrian and Armenian passport applications buried in the middle of this album of 474 pages. It may have taken years- or even decades- for anyone else to have discovered this treasure. Louis says: “When I saw the Aramaic or Syriac writing in the “Guatemala to Mexico” volume, along with “Urmia and Turkey” constantly showing up as a birthplace in this volume and others, the unforgettable faces, the absence of adult males, consular documents with stamps from India, Japan, Russia, Persia for just one individual, references to Baqubah (which I didn’t recognize as a place name), I knew there was something much larger going on.”

When I asked Takács about his motivation for this project, he stated:

“My father was a refugee from Hungary and was always on the lookout for people like him; not necessarily Hungarians, but people who came from somewhere else, anywhere really, to the U.S. I have so many vivid memories of him stopping strangers who spoke another language or spoke English with an accent at a gas station, a restaurant, or coming out of church during the 1970s and ‘80s. He always wanted to trade stories and loved hearing about people’s journeys and getting them to talk about what they left behind, what they thought of America.”

As the daughter of an immigrant, these comments resonated with me. It was always astounding to see my father connect with other Assyrians – and anyone who came to the U.S. from another part of the world. His story was different from many other Assyrians in that he arrived in the United States as an infant and therefore avoided most of the challenges of assimilation. Fortunately, his Assyrian language and culture were preserved by his parents and older brothers. My father always possessed an innate understanding of the immigrant experience and the pull between his very divergent cultures. He could instantly connect with anyone who had faced hardship or adversity, and he often went out of his way to help them.

I share Louis’s very deep-seated feeling that “What you leave behind stays with you one way or another; if you try and hide it, it’s sure to come out in some other way. Maybe just as a flickering memory, maybe as some kind of search for meaning, but it’s always there.”

These two sentences completely captured my thoughts about discovering my grandparents’ experience of fleeing genocide. It’s difficult to possess a vague sense that past challenges have permeated your entire life but not to have the backstory to understand and comprehend their significance. Once the facts and realities of the struggles of your ancestors are known, it often leads to an entirely new view of not only the trajectory of your own life but of the world as a whole.

Events that you may have only read about in books or learned about in school now possess a deeper meaning and significance.

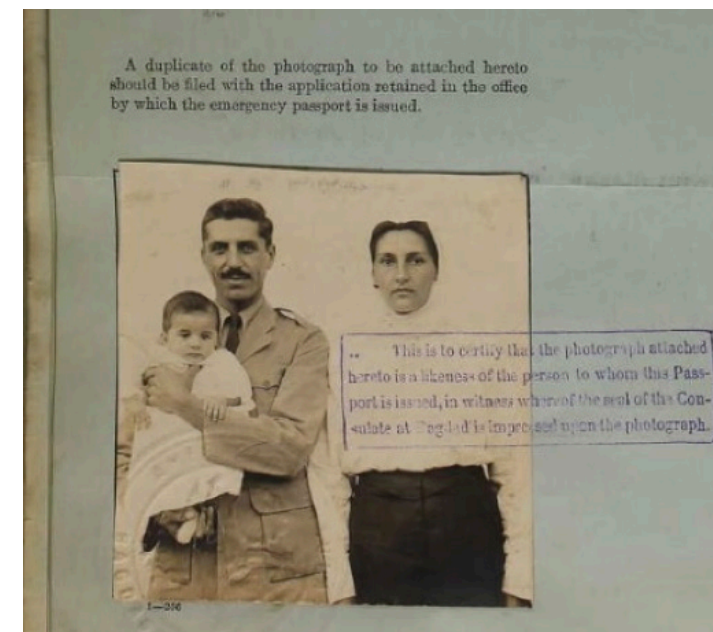
Louis Takács himself has an extended personal connection to the subject of U.S. immigration. His great-grandfather was a return migrant, his grandfather an immigrant, his father a refugee, and he is an immigrant himself. Louis states, “Coupling this with today’s non-stop headlines on the ongoing refugee crisis, the legacy of a “Muslim ban,” and the normalization of anti-immigrant sentiments, I felt that now more than ever was a time to have better visual tools to understand how deeply interwoven immigrant/migrant lives are to the U.S. and the rest of the world. The early 20th-century era of mass migration is perhaps more relevant than ever.”

Finding Louis Takács’ photos online and then connecting with him personally makes me rejoice in the miracle that the endurance of our nation represents. Louis Takács comes across the Assyrian passport photos and is drawn to Nonya Shabbaz because of a vague memory he had of Gorky’s painting which was tied to the very genocide that Nonya was fleeing. In my mind, this was no accident - these images were meant to be

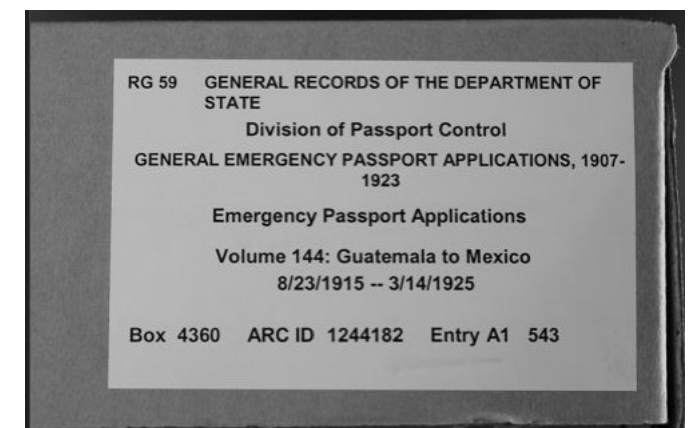
discovered. They are an example of synchronicity – events that transcend mere coincidence and impart deep meaning. My grandparents and so many other refugees could have easily been forgotten – and I’m sure at times they felt that the world had turned its back on them. But a century ago, countries from all over the world made a life-saving commitment and opened their borders to those fleeing oppression. Perhaps the discovery of these immigrant photos and stories is a profound reminder to stay true to our history of providing refuge to those who suffer.



Takács, Louis. “Let Me Get There: Visualizing Immigrants, Transnational Migrations and U.S. Citizens Abroad, 1904–1925,” Alliance for Networking Visual Culture



Abner Nweeya Latchin, Almas, and Robert, 1920, NARA Passport Photo



NARA Record Volume 144: Guatemala to Mexico containing Assyrian Emergency Passport Applications

## In Memory of Lida Ganja

November 11, 1926 – February 6, 2025

Lida Ganja was born on November 11, 1926, in Baghdad, Iraq, to Younatan Yelda and Heleneh Badal Malik, both originally from Sopurghan in the Plain of Urmia, Iran. She was one of five children—Samrida Moushipour and Sargon Yelda, who predeceased her, and Freda Shahbaz and Belles Yelda, who continue to honor her memory.

At the age of three, Lida moved with her family to Kermanshah, Iran, where she spent her childhood and formative years, surrounded by love and faith.

At the age of 15, Lida began her teaching career at Rabi Lucy's Sahdie Elementary School in Kermanshah. Following her father Younatan's passing in 1942, when she was just 16, Lida displayed extraordinary resilience by assisting her mother in raising her younger siblings. She used her sewing skills to support her family while remaining actively involved in her church, contributing to Sunday school and youth programs.

In 1944, Lida met the love of her life, Mattie Ganja, the son of Daniel Samuel Ganja and Nanajan Yousipo. The couple became engaged in Kermanshah and married the following year in Baghdad, Iraq. Their union was blessed with five wonderful children: Edmond, Edwin, Sam, and twins Hamlet and Helen.

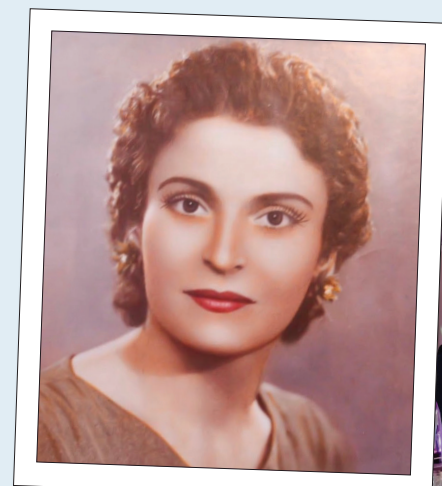
In 1973, driven by hopes for a brighter future, Lida and Mattie immigrated to the United States with the support of her brother Belles Yelda and his wife, Linda. They settled in Modesto, California, where they began anew with perseverance. Mattie established a watch repair business while Lida dedicated herself to nurturing her family, serving her community, and embracing her faith.



Lida's devotion to her family and her faith remained steadfast throughout her life. Even as she faced the challenges of dementia in her 90s, she was surrounded by love and care until her peaceful passing in the care of her daughter, Helen.

Lida is survived by her five children: her sons, Edmond and his wife, Layla; Edwin and his wife, Caroline; Sam and his wife, Lillian; Hamlet and his wife, Shamiran; and her daughter, Helen. She is also survived by thirteen grandchildren: Patricia, Matthew, Daniella, Andrew, Atorina, Patrick, Raman, Sharokina, Mariam, Ramsin, Joseph, and John, as well as a great-granddaughter, Dahlia. Additionally, she leaves behind her sister, Freda Shahbaz; her brother, Belles Yelda, and his wife, Linda; her sister-in-law, Nanajan Yelda, the wife of the late Sargon Yelda; and many cherished nieces, nephews, and extended family members.

Lida Ganja's life was a testament to strength, faith, and unconditional love. She leaves behind a legacy of kindness, generosity, and resilience that will inspire generations to come. Her memory will forever be cherished, and her spirit will live on in the hearts of all who were blessed to know her. May her soul rest in eternal peace, and may her memory continue to be a blessing to all.



# Rediscovering our Assyrian Roots: The Real Identity of Assyrians is More than Kings and Battles

by Elizabeth Mickaily-Huber, Ph.D.  
*by Professor Eden Naby*

*A Reflection on Michel Shamoon-Pour, Ph.D's Lecture at the Thirteenth Member Appreciation Event of the Assyrian Foundation of America*

On April 6, 2025, a full room gathered at the Best Western Hotel in South San Francisco for a powerful lecture that stirred emotions. The Assyrian Foundation of America, celebrating its 60th anniversary, hosted its thirteenth Member Appreciation Event with keynote speaker Michel Shamoon-Pour, Ph.D, an Assyrian genetic anthropologist who invites us to rethink how we view our history, identity, and future.

Shamoon-Pour, an Associate Professor at Binghamton University (SUNY), specializes in population genetics and paleo-genomics. However, in this presentation, he set science aside to focus on a more personal and cultural imperative: that Assyrians must reclaim their identity by relearning their true history, not the sanitized, imperial tales of kings and wars, but the people's history. The kind lived in neighborhoods, debated in councils, and preserved across centuries by ordinary families.

Assyrian identity, Shamoon-Pour argued,

has long been shaped by outdated narratives. Traditional histories tend to focus on empires, military campaigns, and conquest, offering little insight into the social and political lives of everyday Assyrians. By emphasizing these overlooked elements, he encouraged a rethink of what Assyrian history really is. As he put it, "True history is messy."

Rather than celebrating only kings and battles, Shamoon-Pour highlighted examples of democratic governance in ancient Mesopotamia. City-states were often run by councils, a democratic model that predated and possibly even influenced later Greek systems. In fact, while only 10% of Athenians could participate in their government, Mesopotamian councils often represented a broader segment of the population.

Among the most compelling examples were the neighborhood councils, known as *Babtum*, which played a vital role in the administration of daily life. These grassroots governing bodies not only made collective decisions but also ensured justice was accessible for the people and by the people. Historical records point to jury trials

composed of local residents, evidence of a justice system that offered protection even to the weakest and poorest members of society.

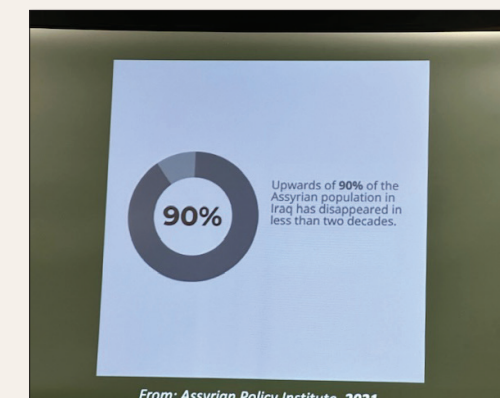
This "reframing" challenges the conventional narrative of Greece as the cradle of democracy and restores Assyria's place in the broader history of participatory governance. It paints a picture of a people deeply engaged in civic life, not merely subjects of empire but active participants in their own communal affairs.

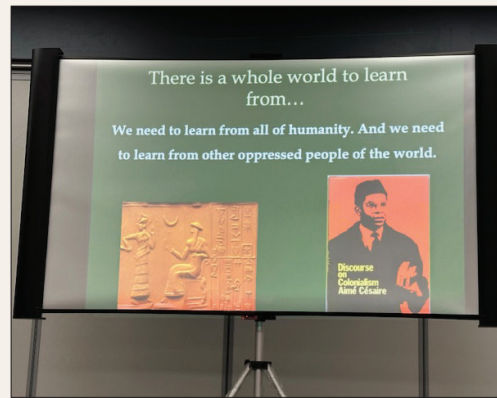
As the conversation deepened, Shamoon-Pour shifted the focus toward a central and emotionally resonant theme: identity. What truly defines the Assyrian people today? He explored how the threads of language, religion, territory, and history weave together to form the modern Assyrian experience. Language, for instance, has become a fragile thread, as many Assyrians in the diaspora no longer speak their mother tongue, severing a vital link to their heritage. Religion, too, has diversified over generations, ranging from the ancient traditions of the Church of the East to denominations shaped by Western missionary

influence. Our ancestral lands, meanwhile, often exist more as sacred memories or romanticized visions than physical realities. Nevertheless, anchoring all of this is our shared history — specifically, the unhealed wound of genocide. Shamoon-Pour posed a deeply personal question to the audience: Are we Assyrian Americans, or are we simply Americans? The distinction, he argued, is not superficial. Assyrian identity has never been centered on individualism. "We were all *nashe d'mata*," he reminded us, people of the land, bonded by community, collective memory, and a common destiny.

Yet this identity has not gone unchallenged. Centuries of colonization and missionary intervention fractured our cultural fabric. Western institutions, under the guise of salvation, often exploited religion to divide Assyrians, dismantling the unity once fostered by the Church of the East. In reclaiming who we are, Shamoon-Pour emphasized, we must confront these ruptures and intentionally rebuild the threads that once held us together.

Perhaps the most emotional part of the lecture



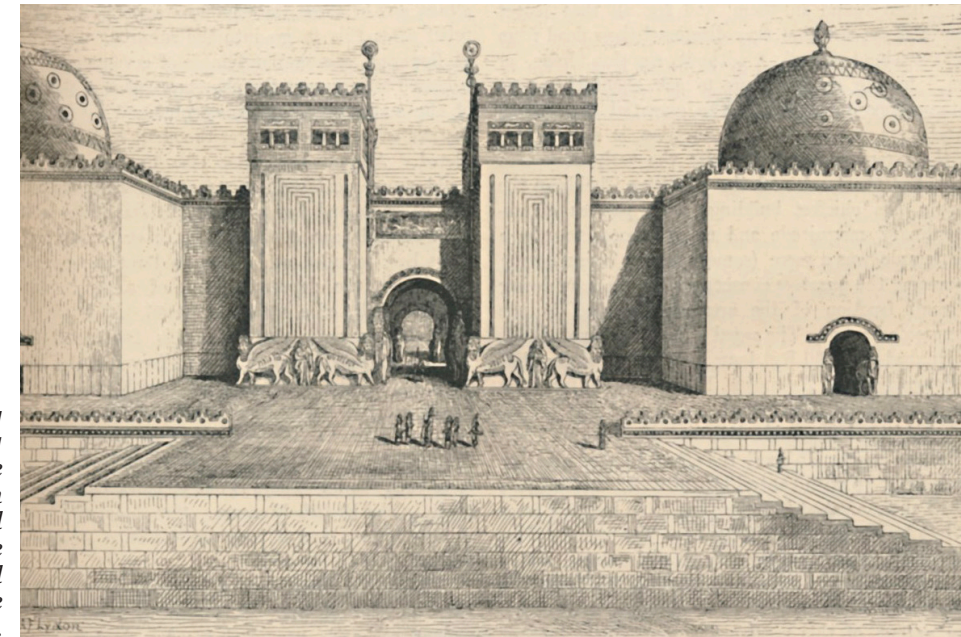


addressed the genocide that binds the modern Assyrian experience together. "We are all children of genocide survivors," Shamooun-Pour said. Since 2021, nearly 90% of Assyrians in Iraq have either died or fled. The legacy of trauma remains raw and unresolved.

However, this shared pain can also be a source of unity. The key, he said, is to look not just to the distant past, but to our recent ancestors and the post-genocide period. We must be open to new facts, resist reactionary mindsets, and avoid aligning with the very powers responsible for our historical displacement while trying to claim indigeneity. Additionally, he encouraged Assyrians to stand in solidarity with other marginalized groups and acknowledge their collective traumas, not only to build alliances, but to affirm a common struggle for justice, dignity, and recognition. In doing so, Assyrians can help foster a broader culture of remembrance and resistance—one that honors our own past while recognizing the ongoing suffering of others.

Shamooun-Pour offered tangible suggestions for cultural and historical revival. He urged the community to actively learn and educate others about the real history and lived experiences of Assyrians, moving beyond mythology to focus on documented social structures and a grounded, modern identity. Equally vital, he encouraged the submission of new research and personal narratives to help reclaim our voice in both scholarly and communal spaces. In doing so, we build not only knowledge, but pride—an identity that honors both the past and the future.

This was more than just a lecture. It was a call to action. A reminder that to be Assyrian is to be part of a living, breathing story still being written. As the Assyrian Foundation of America enters its seventh decade, events like this ensure that our history won't be fossilized in museums or lost in diaspora, but instead lived, spoken, taught, and evolved, by *nashe d'mata* everywhere.



A 19th century illustration showing what Sargon's palace at Dur-Sharrukin may have looked like. A survey at the site has revealed new insights into the ancient city.

## New discoveries unveil hidden structures in ancient Assyrian city

By Naila Huseynova

### A team of researchers has uncovered previously unknown features at the ancient Assyrian city of Dur-Sharrukin, located in modern-day northern Iraq.

Researchers have made several fascinating discoveries at an ancient city that briefly served as the capital for one of history's most influential and powerful empires.

The city, known as Dur-Sharrukin, is located at the present-day site of Khorsabad, a village in northern Iraq. It was established during the reign of King Sargon II, who ruled the Assyrian empire from 721 B.C. until his death in 705 B.C.

King Sargon constructed the city, naming it after himself, to serve as the new capital of the empire. However, following his sudden death in battle, his son and successor moved the capital to Nineveh shortly afterward. As a result, Dur-Sharrukin was gradually abandoned in the subsequent decades, having never been fully completed.

Now, a research team have announced the results of an investigation into the ancient archaeological site that revealed evidence of previously unknown buildings and infrastructure within the square city walls, which enclose an area of more than one square mile. The findings indicate that more construction had been completed at the site than previously thought.

Research at Dur-Sharrukin has faced significant challenges in recent years due to ongoing conflicts. In 2015, members of the Islamic State (IS) destroyed parts of the ancient city, and shortly afterward, fighting erupted between Kurdish forces and IS soldiers in the region. However, in 2022, a team led by Jörg Fassbinder from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich successfully mapped approximately seven percent of the city using a high-resolution magnetometer. This advanced tool detects specific magnetic properties in various soils, rocks, and other materials,

enabling archaeologists to "visualize" hidden features beneath the surface. To conduct the survey, the researchers manually carried the 33-pound magnetometer system, walking long, straight lines to cover an area of 2.79 million square feet over the course of a week. Due to the volatile situation in the area, the team chose not to use a drone or vehicle for the mapping to avoid drawing unwanted attention.

After gathering the magnetic data, the team was able to generate grayscale images of the site, revealing the outlines of several previously unknown structures. Among these were five massive, monumental buildings, including what seems to be a 127-room villa—twice the size of the White House. The survey also uncovered other intriguing features, such as potential palace gardens.

"Every day we discovered something new," Fassbinder said in a press release. "All of this was found with no excavation. Excavation is very expensive, so the archaeologists wanted to know in detail what they could expect to achieve by digging. The survey saved time and money. It's a necessary tool before starting any excavation."

At one location of particular interest, the team dug a small test trench, which confirmed the presence of a "very substantial" building with 13-foot-thick mud brick walls, some of which appear to be up to four feet high.

The features identified by the survey will require further investigation, but the work has already provided significant new insights into the development of the short-lived ancient capital.

The research findings were presented on Monday, December 9 at the American Geophysical Union's 2024 Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.—although the findings have yet to be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

*I am pleased to inform you of the forthcoming publication of a book of interviews with me, scheduled for release on May 29, 2025, entitled:*

## For the Love of a Mother Itineraries of an Assyrian

– Prof. Emeritus Joseph Yacoub

This work, conducted by journalist Pascal Maguesyan, will be published by Cerf Publisher in Paris.

### Presentation

This book traces a life journey, a body of work, and a struggle—one that also reflects the experiences of the Assyro-Chaldean community, Eastern Christians who have long been forgotten. In these interviews, Joseph Yacoub takes us back to the roots of his native Mesopotamia. He shares his human, intellectual, and spiritual journey, recounting his family and community life, marked by displacement and tragedy. His odyssey spans from Iran to the Caucasus, Georgia to Syria (Hassaké), Syria to Lebanon, and finally from Lebanon to France. This wandering led him to question: Who am I? Who are we? What is our place in the diaspora, in the lands of exile?

This introspection shaped his journey. Seeking to understand his parents' origins and explore their ethnic, cultural, and religious identity, Joseph Yacoub uncovered a forgotten genocide—the Assyro-Chaldean genocide, perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1918, alongside the Armenian genocide.

He delved into the depths of his mother tongue, Aramaic—the language of Christ—and his religious heritage, which dates back to the dawn of Christianity in the East. In doing so, he embarked on a journey of discovery and rediscovery of the cultural riches of his community.

*Pour l'amour d'une mère Itinéraires d'un Assyro-Chaldéen translation :*

## For the Love of a Mother Itineraries of an Assyrian

Realized by a journalist Pascal Maguesyan, which will be published by Cerf Publisher in Paris.

### Présentation

Le parcours d'une vie, d'une oeuvre et d'un combat, et à travers lui, celui de la communauté assyro-chaldéenne, ces chrétiens d'Orient, longtemps oubliés. Dans ces entretiens Joseph Yacoub nous entraîne aux sources de sa Mésopotamie natale.

Joseph Yacoub nous fait part de son parcours humain, intellectuel et spirituel. Il nous conte sa vie familiale et communautaire, marquée d'errance et de tragique, de l'Iran au Caucase, de la Géorgie à la Syrie (Hassaké), de la Syrie au Liban, et du Liban en France.

Une pérégrination qui l'a conduit à s'interroger : Qui suis-je ? Qui sommes-nous ? Quelle place en diaspora, c'est-à-dire dans les pays de la dispersion ?

Telle est l'origine de son itinéraire. En voulant savoir d'où venaient ses parents et scruter leur identité ethnique, culturelle et religieuse, Joseph Yacoub a découvert qu'ils étaient des rescapés d'un génocide que beaucoup ignorent : celui des Assyro-Chaldéens, perpétré par l'Empire ottoman en 1915-1918, à l'instar du génocide des Arméniens.

Il s'est plongé dans les profondeurs de sa langue maternelle qui est l'araméen, la langue du Christ, son patrimoine religieux, qui remonte à l'aube du christianisme en Orient, pour partir à la découverte ou la redécouverte des richesses culturels de sa communauté.

## Pour 'amour d'une mère

– Prof. Emeritus Joseph Yacoub

Here is the story of a life. Here is the story of a people. Here, against oppression and oblivion, is the struggle of the Assyro-Chaldean community for truth — the struggle of these Christians of the East who, between martyrdom and splendor, strive to preserve the memory of centuries past and to build a possible future.

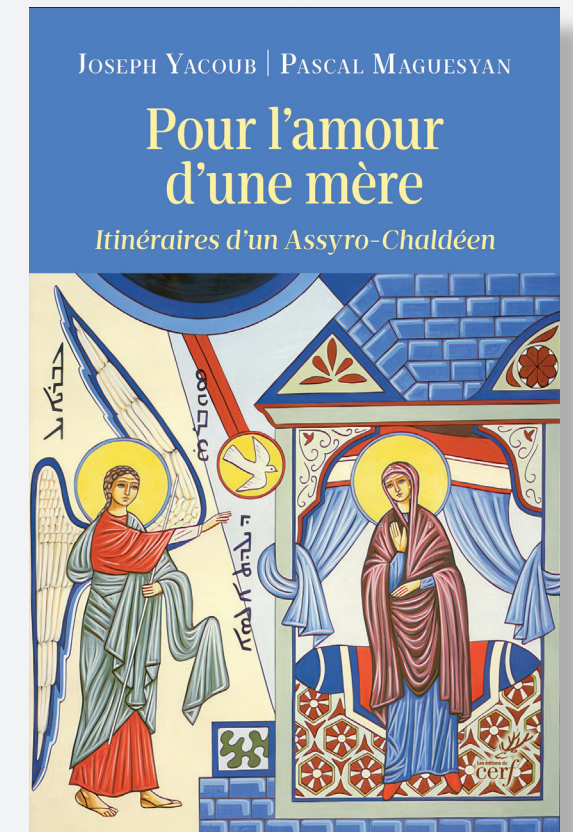
Delving deep into his native language, Aramaic — the language of Christ — and into his religious heritage, which dates back to the dawn of Christianity in the East, Joseph Yacoub takes us to the very sources of his native Syro-Mesopotamia. He tells the story of his community, marked by the genocide that his parents survived.

It is a story of wandering, from Iran to the Caucasus, from Georgia to Syria, and from Lebanon to France, which ultimately led him to ask: Who am I? Who are we? What is our place in the diaspora — that is, in the countries of dispersion?

Shed in the light of a tragic past, this moving story offers one of the most universal messages of all.

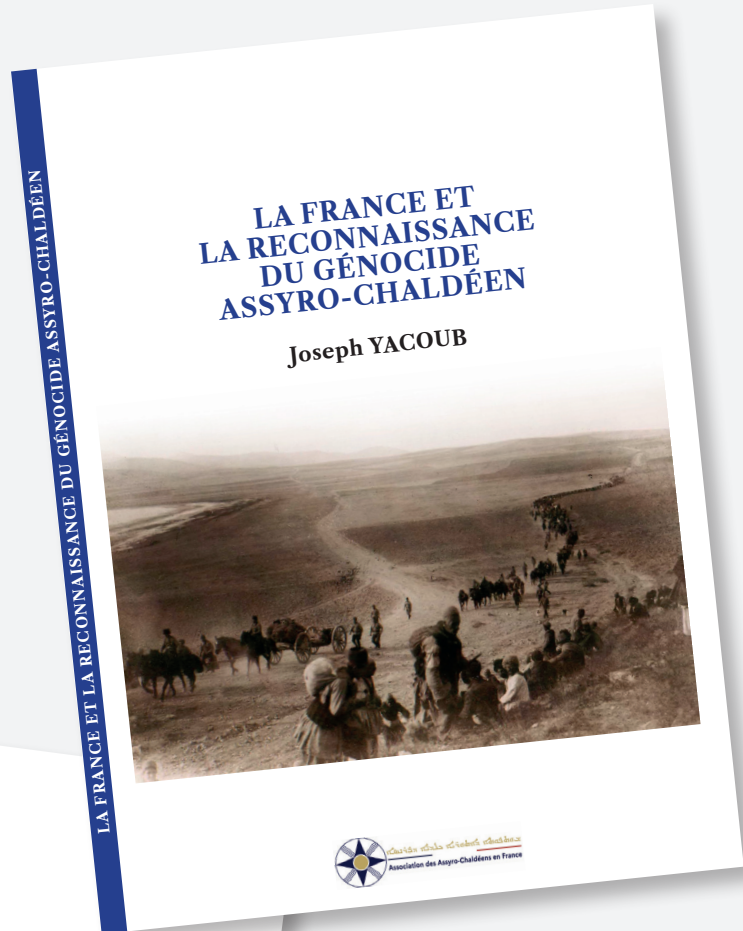
An honorary professor at the Catholic University of Lyon and the first holder of the UNESCO Chair "Memory, Cultures, and Interculturality," Joseph Yacoub is the author of many works, including *Forgotten by All: The Assyro-Chaldeans of the Caucasus* (co-written with Claire Yacoub) and *Who Will Remember?*

Writer, traveler, and photographer Pascal Maguesyan is the co-founder of the association Mesopotamia. He is the author of several works, including *Christians of the East: Shadows and Lights* and *Mesopotamia, A Heritage Adventure in Iraq*.



**La France et la Reconnaissance du Genocide Assyro-Chaldeen**

by Prof. Emeritus Joseph Yacoub



**Joseph YACOUB**  
 Professeur honoraire de l'Université catholique de Lyon, premier titulaire de la chaire UNESCO « Mémoires, cultures et interculturelité », docteur en langues, spécialiste des chrétiens d'Orient, traduit en une dizaine de langues, Joseph Yacoub a publié de nombreux ouvrages et études, parmi lesquels : *Les minorités. Quelle protection?* (DDB, 1995) — *Qui s'en souviendra? 1915: le génocide assyro-chaldéen* (DDB, 2014) — *Year of the Sword* (Hats, 1916) — *Une diversité menacée. Les chrétiens d'Orient* (Salvator, 2018) — *Le Moyen-Orient syriaque. La face méconnue d'une tragédie qui se répète* (L'Harmattan, 2021) — *Martyrs par Amour* (Salvator, 2022).



Réfugiés chrétiens assyriens de Tyari et Tkhuma, Kurdistan, à l'automne 1915.



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## Penn Museum's New Exhibition Preserving Assyria Highlights Restoring Iraq's Cultural Heritage Through Community-Led Archaeology

By Penn Museum Jan 8, 2025 TwitterFacebook

PHILADELPHIA, January 7, 2025—In conflict zones like Syria and Ukraine, erasure is a part of systematic genocide and cultural cleansing, but **a new exhibition shifts the focus to cultural heritage restoration through community-led excavation—***Preserving Assyria* showcases **archaeology's role in safeguarding cultural heritage from targeted destruction.**

With **16 objects** on display from the Penn Museum's collection, **touchable 3D replicas of monumental relief carvings**, and interactive multimedia components, **this exhibition will be on view** in the Merle-Smith Galleries on the Lower Level **starting Saturday, February 8, 2025.**

One of the world's earliest empires, Assyria represents a crucial part of Iraq's cultural identity, which the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attempted to erase by destroying many Mesopotamian monuments

in 2016—one of which was Mashki Gate in the ancient city of Nineveh (near Mosul in Northern Iraq).

With a long history of collaborating with the Iraqi researchers and officials, exhibition curators Dr. Michael Danti, Program Director of the [Iraq Heritage Stabilization Program](#), and Dr. Richard L. Zettler, Director Emeritus, intend to spotlight the groundbreaking archaeological discoveries at Mashki Gate, and underscore how collaborative excavations center the cultural heritage priorities of the local people.

"Working closely with our Iraqi colleagues and local communities, scientific field archaeology is playing a key role in recovery efforts in Iraq, shedding new light on ancient cultures and, at the same time, enabling us to reconstruct damaged sites in more authentic and sustainable ways," Dr. Danti explains. "Our main goal is to re-establish and enhance access to cultural heritage as a fundamental human right."

One of the biggest discoveries since the 19th century are superbly preserved marble reliefs unearthed at Mashki Gate. They date back to an Assyrian king, Sennacherib, who ruled Nineveh from 705 to 681 BCE. As the **original skillfully carved panels**, depicting finely chiseled war scenes, mountains, grape vines, and palm trees **remain in Iraq, visitors will be able to view intricate replicas, made via 3D scanning**, of segments from these extraordinary reliefs.

"...These panels can become a celebrated cultural and archaeological attraction for Iraqis and international tourists. Personally, I have longed to touch our ancestors' artifacts on museum visits in the West. **Now, with these panels restored by Iraqi hands, I can experience the joy of physically connecting with our heritage** and marvel at the skill and dedication of ancient artists," explains Iraqi Assyriologist Dr. Ali al-Jabouri, Professor Emeritus at University of Mosul.

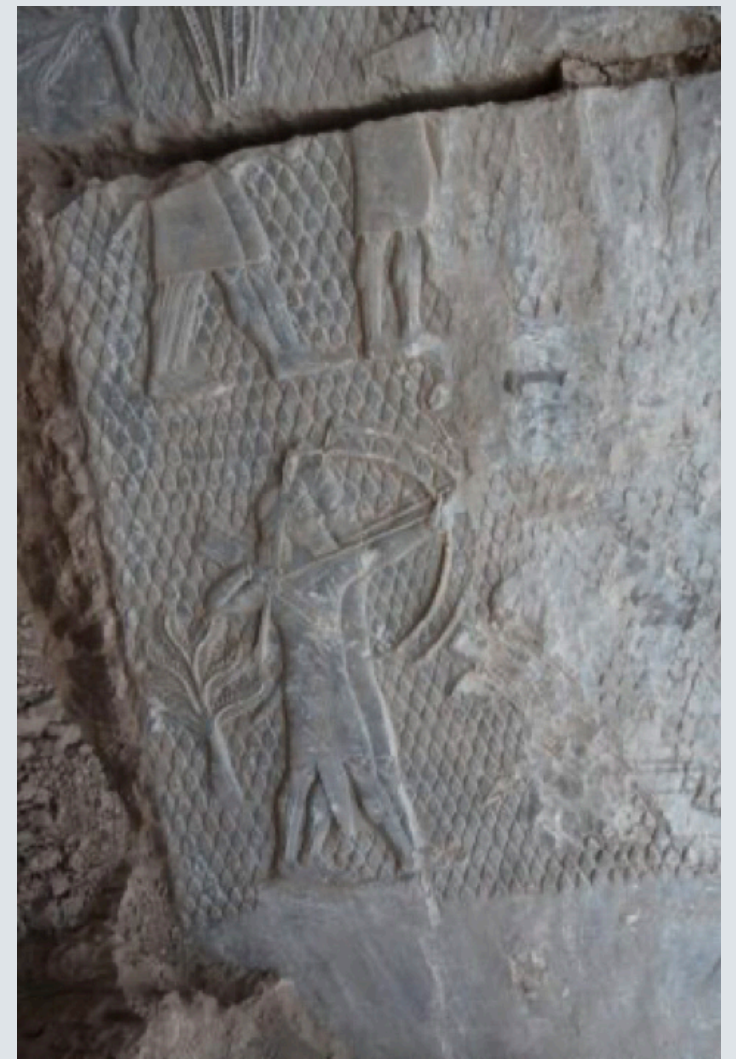
To chart the story of the Neo-Assyrian empire and its deep significance to Iraq's heritage, the exhibition will feature a **timeline** of Assyrian history; **digital reconstructions** of what the ancient city once looked like; illustrations of King Sennacherib's palace; and **images from current excavations** that offer "day-in-the-life" glimpses of archaeologists-in-action.

*Preserving Assyria* will **illuminate select artifacts from the Penn Museum's Near East collections**, such as a stamp-inscribed brick from Tell Yarah, Iraq (near Mosul) written in the Sumerian language (911-612 BCE); a Sumerian clay tablet that contains ancient spells to ward off witchcraft (1900-1600 BCE); a glazed terracotta wall tile from Hasanlu, Iran (1000-800 BCE), cylinder seals made of quartz and marble; and a protective amulet made of carnelian.

Public programs related to the new exhibition include a special **Curator's Lecture on February 8 at 2:00 pm** in Rainey Auditorium, as well as an engaging four-week online class, *The Deep Dig: The Rise and Fall of Assyria*, led by Dr. Michael Danti beginning March 6. Included with Museum admission, [Preserving Assyria](#) will be on view **through February 2026.**



Opening at the Penn Museum on Feb. 8, 2025, the *Preserving Assyria* exhibition will showcase a rendering of a restored palace wall in Nineveh. Photo\_ Penn Museum.jpg



The remarkably preserved reliefs discovered at the Mashki Gate in Nineveh offer exquisite detail. Portions of this have been 3D scanned and replicas will be on display as a part of *Preserving Assyria* at the Penn Museum. Opening Feb. 8, 2025 Photo\_ Penn Museum.jpg



This Mashki Gate marble relief shows a high-ranking captive of the Assyrians during a military campaign. Portions of this have been 3D scanned and replicas will be on display as a part of Preserving Assyria at the Penn Museum. Opening Feb. 8, 2025. Photo\_Penn Museum.jpg



Penn's Dr. Michael Danti cleans one of the seven ancient reliefs found at Nineveh. Photo-Penn Museum.jpeg



The U.S.-Iraqi excavation team continue their work to protect and preserve cultural heritage. Opening Feb. 8, 2025, a new exhibition, Preserving Assyria, highlights the Penn Museum's cultural preservation work in Iraq. Photo-Penn Museum.jpeg



An international team of Iraqi archaeologists, alongside researchers from the Penn Museum, uncover the 6.5-foot-high monumental doors of an Assyrian king's palace. Photo\_Michael Danti, Penn Museum.JPG

### ABOUT THE PENN MUSEUM

The Penn Museum's mission is to be a center for inquiry and the ongoing exploration of humanity for our University of Pennsylvania, regional, national, and global communities, following ethical standards and practices.

Through conducting research, stewarding collections, creating learning opportunities, sharing stories, and creating experiences that expand access to archaeology and anthropology, the Museum builds empathy and connections across diverse cultures.

The Penn Museum is open Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm. On first Wednesdays of the month, it is open until 8:00 pm. The Café is open Tuesday–Thursday, 9:00 am–3:00 pm and Friday and Saturday, 10:00 am–2:00 pm. On Sundays, the Café is open 10:30 am–2:30 pm. For information, visit [www.penn.museum](http://www.penn.museum), call 215.898.4000, or follow @PennMuseum on social media.

# Thank you



**From: Etuti Institute**

**To: Assyrian Foundation of America**

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude for your generous donation of \$4,000 towards the rehabilitation of the new Etuti Learning Center & Ashurbanipal Library in the heart of Bakhdida, Nineveh. Through this center, we will continue to educate, enable, and empower Assyrian children, youth, and women in Nineveh by organizing skill-building, educational, cultural, artistic, and sports programs.

Additionally, the center provides employment opportunities for Assyrians in the region, strengthening our community's presence and prosperity in our ancestral homeland.

The Ashurbanipal Library, an essential part of the center, symbolizes the first-ever library in the world, established in ancient Nineveh by King Ashurbanipal. It was established in 2017 after the liberation of Nineveh from ISIS. It serves as a powerful reminder of our rich Assyrian heritage and our enduring commitment to preserving knowledge and culture.

We are deeply appreciative of your continued support and partnership, which empowers our people in the homeland and ensures that future generations have access to education and opportunities to thrive.



# Preserving the Assyrian Language

By Michaeil A. Younan



Every Assyrian in diaspora wants to preserve our Language! If we lose it, we will lose our identity in the future. Speaking our parents only, our language, will not preserve it, and in the course of time, it will remain only among the prelates and deacons like the old times.

Our Churches and some associations and institutions in diaspora, teach the Assyrian language with few classes for students under age of 12 – 14 years old, once or twice a week for one or two hours only. Their efforts are very much appreciated, but this is not enough due to the facts that the knowledge of the student is limited. Other factor is when the student moves to a high school, college and university to pursue his/her studies, they become uninterested in learning the Assyrian language especially if they live far from the Assyrian schools. It is not convenient for the student to drive back and forth to the school at night for one hour or two especially in the large cities. This is not practical and effective. If we continue with this situation without progress, then the percentage of the Assyrian young generation educated students in Assyrian language may decrease and consequently we will not have sufficient teachers for the future. The longer we delay finding effective solutions, our young generation will assimilate easily into other societies and cultures, thus the Assyrian language may not be needed for them and for their children.

In order to be hopeful, we should think in a goal-oriented way at least one goal that is intrinsically meaningful. We should plan for the future with excitement and ambition, a theory as “pathways” a perception that there are plans of getting us from what we are now to our goals.

Having said that, let us take as an example “*the Assyrian Schools Council*” of the Assyrian Church of the East in Australia with a Curriculum, which includes twelve textbooks from kindergarten to tenth grade. (summarized as follow):

- Saint Hurmizd Early Education Center for children (4 -5 years old)
- Saint Hurmizd Primary School, for students (5 -12 years old)
- Saint Narsai Assyrian Christian College for Senior students (12 – 18 years old)
- College of Assyrian Language for students (age 18 and above)
- Nisibis Assyrian Theological College (age 18 and above)
- Mar Narsai Christian College, with more than 650 students (includes Library, Laboratories, Computer classes, Sports field and Arts center)
- Sait George Assyrian Language School, with more than 530 students)

There are more educational projects in Australia in the near future.

The same could be said for the Assyrian schools in our mother country (today Iraq) are commended for their efforts of preserving our language and culture with a curriculum from kindergarten to 4<sup>th</sup> grade so far.

For the being time, we know the capabilities of our Assyrian communities in diaspora especially in the State of Illinois, USA which is the largest community, are limited due to lack of financial resources. We have to seek other alternatives (American local schools) that are available in USA that teaches multilingualism and multiculturalism, to develop knowledge of second language acquisition. The following Colleges and Universities offer courses for Near Eastern Languages including the Assyrian/Syriac language for Assyrian and non-Assyrian students as follows:

- Elementary (First year, level 1)
- Intermediate (Second year, level 2)
- Advanced (Third year, level 3)

List of the Colleges and Universities where there are large Assyrian communities:

- University of Chicago, email: [infocenter@uchicago.edu](mailto:infocenter@uchicago.edu) Tel: (773)702-3183
- Northeastern Illinois University, LWH, email: [info@neie.edu](mailto:info@neie.edu)  
Dept. of World Languages and Culture. Tel:(773) 442-4293, (773)583-4050  
Note: This University, adopted my Assyrian Language teaching book ONE and book TWO, entitled “*The Book of my Language (Assyrian)*”
- Maine Township High School, District 207 (Chicago) Tel: (847) 696-3600  
Email: [info@maine207.org](mailto:info@maine207.org) and [smessmer@maine207.org](mailto:smessmer@maine207.org)  
Note: This High School also adopted my books , book ONE and book TWO
- University of Berkeley, Calif. email: [info@berkeley.edu](mailto:info@berkeley.edu) Tel:(510)642-3757
- University of UCLA, California, email: [ada@saonet.ucla.edu](mailto:ada@saonet.ucla.edu) Tel: (310) 825-4165
- Arizona State University, email:[customerservice@asu.edu](mailto:customerservice@asu.edu) Tel:(855)278-5080

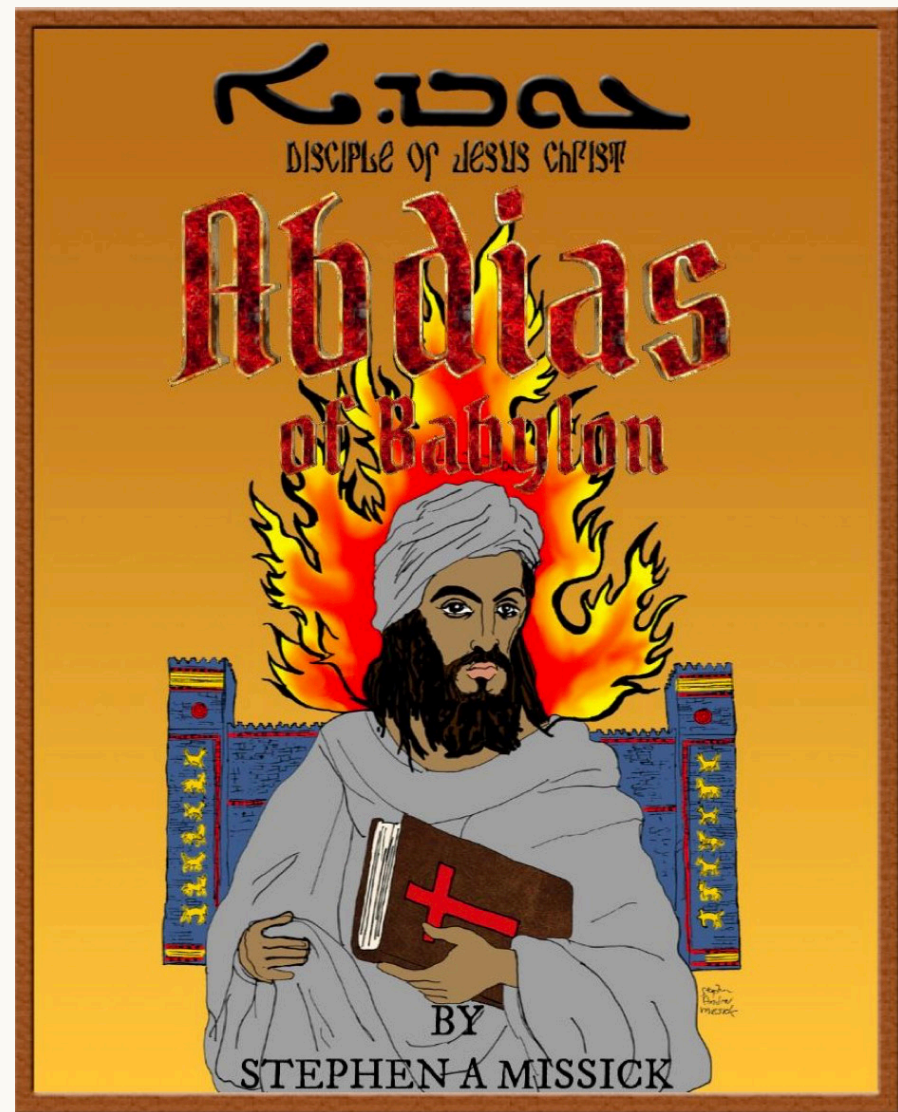
It is worth to mention the other schools in other states that offer the same courses, even though there are very few or no Assyrians living in those states. The following is the list:

- University of Minnesota, email: [carla@umn.edu](mailto:carla@umn.edu) Tel. (612) 626- 8600
- University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, email: [mcae@umn.edu](mailto:mcae@umn.edu) Tel: (612) 625-5353
- Abilene Christian University, in Texas, email: [ogc@acu.edu](mailto:ogc@acu.edu) Tel: (915) 674-2730
- Baylor University, in Texas, email: [admissions@baylor.edu](mailto:admissions@baylor.edu) Tel: (817) 755-3744
- Brigham University, in Utah, email: [byu-info@byu.edu](mailto:byu-info@byu.edu) Tel:(801)378-3396
- Catholic University of America, in Washington D.C. email: [admissions@cua.edu](mailto:admissions@cua.edu) Tel: (202) 319-5083
- Columbia University, in New York, email: [askcuit@columbia.edu](mailto:askcuit@columbia.edu) Tel: (212) 854-2556
- Dallas Theology Seminar, in Texas, email: [info@dts.edu](mailto:info@dts.edu) Tel. (214) 841- 365
- Harvard University, in Massachusetts, [nelc@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:nelc@fas.harvard.edu) Tel: (617) 495-5757
- New York University, email: [inquireCUNY@cuny.edu](mailto:inquireCUNY@cuny.edu) Tel: (212) 998-8980
- Oral Roberts University, in Oklahoma, email: [admissions@oru.edu](mailto:admissions@oru.edu) Tel: (918) 495-6161 Tel: (609) 258-4281 and (609) 258-4900
- University of Notre Dame, in Indiana, email: [webgroup@nd.edu](mailto:webgroup@nd.edu) Tel: (219) 631-7195
- University of Pennsylvania , email: [elp@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:elp@sas.upenn.edu) Tel: (215) 898-6335
- Yale University, in Connecticut, email: [accessibility@yale@yale.edu](mailto:accessibility@yale@yale.edu) [ux@yale.edu](mailto:ux@yale.edu) Tel: (203) 432-2944
- Stanislaus University, in Turlock, California, email: [mperez78@csustan.edu](mailto:mperez78@csustan.edu) Tel: (209) 667-3122
- Stanford University, in California, email: [ctl-stanford@Stanford.edu](mailto:ctl-stanford@Stanford.edu) Tel: (650) 723-2300
- University of Toronto, in Canada, email: [help.desk@utoronto.ca](mailto:help.desk@utoronto.ca) Tel: (416) 978-3180

We all say, “*the first school is at home*” therefore, the parents should inspire, educate and instill in the mind of their children the love and the importance of preserving our Assyrian language. Then comes the role of our esteemed Assyrian teachers who have the capability, also the knowledge of English language to check with the aforementioned schools for all the information because the course is also for non-Assyrians. The teachers will be paid for their service. I have been told that the schools have hard time finding Assyrian teachers!

The program of the aforementioned schools is effective for Assyrian students to perform better if they enroll in the Assyrian course during the day on the campus as part of a formal academic curriculum program like any other subject. Even though their number will be minimum compared to non-Assyrians, but at least they will graduate with a degree. Thus, will enable them to be Assyrian language teachers and every year new students will graduate. This method will spread among other schools and the number of graduates will increase. We will have also a generation of highly educated young students.

We should not despair. We should translate our speeches and wishes into deeds for the sake of our Assyrian language and culture. There may be a hope!



## Abdias of Babylon and the founding of the Assyrian Church of the East

By Dr. Stephen Andrew Missick

*“To Simon [Peter] was allotted Rome, and to John Ephesus; to Thomas India, and to Addaeus [Mar Addai, also known as Thaddeus of Edessa] the country of the Assyrians. And, when they were sent to each one of them the district that had been allotted to him, they devoted themselves to bring the several countries to discipleship.”-From the Homily about the Town of Antioch in Memoirs of Edessa and Other Ancient Syriac Documents, translated by the Rev. B. Pratten.*

According to the ancient sources, including the writings of Eusebius, who is known as the “Father of Church History” and wrote in the year 325 AD, the Assyrian Church was founded by the Apostles of Jesus Christ, Thomas and Thaddeus. Usually, Thaddeus is identified with Jude Thaddeus who was one of the Twelve Apostles. However, Assyrian Church tradition is very

clear that Mar Addai, or Thaddeus of Edessa, is to be distinguished from Jude Thaddeus. As is written in *The Teaching of the Apostles*;

**India, and all the countries belonging to it and round about it, even to the farthest sea, received the apostles’ ordination to the priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was guide and ruler in the church which he had built there, in which he also ministered there. Edessa, and all the countries round about it which were on all sides of it, and Zoba, and Arabia, and all the north, and the regions round about it, and the south, and all the regions on the borders of Mesopotamia, received the apostles’ ordination to the priesthood from Addai the apostle, one of the seventy-two apostles who himself made disciples there, and built a church there, and was priest and**

**ministered there in his office of Guide which he held there. The whole of Persia, of the Assyrians, and of the Armenians, and of the Medians, and of the countries round about Babylon, the Huzites and the Gelæ, as far as the borders of the Indians, and as far as the land of Gog and Magog, and moreover all the countries on all sides, received the apostles’ ordination to the priesthood from Aggai, a maker of silks, the disciple of Addai the apostle.**

In the Assyrian Church tradition, there is a trilogy of sorts, written in Aramaic, that chronicles the founding of the Assyrian Church in Mesopotamia and India. These are “The Doctrine of Addai,” “The Acts of Thomas,” and “The Acts of Mari.” Mari was the disciple of Addai and is credited with composing with Addai the “Anaphora of Mar Addai and Mar Mari,” which is the main liturgy of the Assyrian Church and the oldest Christian liturgy in use in the world. Addai, Mari, and Aggai are all said to be numbered among the 72 disciples of Jesus mentioned in Luke 10:1-24. There is a tradition of another disciple, who was also numbered among the 72 disciples, who is also said to have worked with Thaddeus in the evangelizing Mesopotamia. He is called Abdias of Babylon. Abdias is the Greek form of the name Obadiah which means “Servant of God.” (A form of this name “Abdisho,” meaning “Servant of Eeshoo/Jesus” was a popular one among Assyrians in former times.) Most Assyrians are unaware that what was viewed as the authentic traditional account of the lives of the Twelve Apostles was traditionally attributed to one of their fellow countrymen. Abdias of Babylon is said to have written an anthology of the lives of the Twelve Apostles, which is usually known as *The Apostolic Histories according to Abdias of Babylon* and which some scholars call “Pseudo-Abdias,” because they doubt the tradition attribution. *The Apostolic Histories according to Abdias of Babylon* does recount the founding of the church in Mesopotamia. In the section on Thomas, it recounts the famous story of the conversion of King Abgar of Edessa, in which Thomas sends Thaddeus to bring the Gospel to King Abgar in response to the letter that King Abgar had sent to Jesus. In the account of the lives of Saint Simon and Saint Jude, it tells the story of the evangelization of Mesopotamia and Babylonia. In the Assyrian accounts, it is Mari who founds the church in Babylonia, and nothing is said of Abdias. However, the sources are fragmentary, and the accounts of Abdias and his work, may have been preserved elsewhere, as we find them in the Latin texts. According to the *Apostolic Histories*, Abdias first wrote in “Hebrew,” probably meaning Aramaic, and his writings were then translated into Greek and then into Latin from the Greek. In *The Passion of Simon and Jude*, the Apostles Jude Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot evangelize Mesopotamia to great success, and they ordain Abdias

over Babylon. They are summoned before a ruler named Varardach. In his court, they contend with two magicians named Zaroas and Arfaxat. The Apostles dispel the magic of the sorcerers who are then banished from the court, but the Apostle will contend with them again later. Simon and Jude perform many miracles and healings and baptize 60,000 men as well as women and children. Then the Apostles depart to continue to spread the message of Jesus throughout all the surrounding lands. After several years evangelizing Mesopotamia, Simon and Jude finally overcome the wicked sorcerers Zaroas and Arfaxat and suffer martyrdom at the hands of pagan priests. The account then states that Abdias recorded their acts. In ten chapters, Abdias gives the lives of each of the Twelve Apostles.

I have included the accounts attributed to Abdias of Babylon in my book *“The Further Acts of the Apostles according to Abdias of Babylon.”* The writings traditionally attributed to Abdias of Babylon, the complete title of which is, *Abdias, the Bishop of Babylon, and a Disciples of the Apostles, on the History of the Apostolic Struggle, in Ten Books*, has not yet been translated from the Latin into English in its entirety, so my book is derived from the long quotations from “Abdias of Babylon” found in “The Golden Legend.” “The Golden Legend” is a collection of hagiographies composed by Jacobus de Voragine in 1260. There are many other stories about the Apostles that were written by Assyrian Christians. Besides the stories of Thomas, Thaddeus, and Mari, there are important accounts of the Apostles John, Phillip, Andrew, and Peter in Aramaic. Among the Syriac Aramaic accounts of the Apostle Peter, known as Shamon Kepa in Aramaic, which is sometimes written as Simon Cephas, we have *The History of Simon Cephas the Chief of the Apostles, The Travels of Peter, The Exhortation of Peter, The Life of Clement who Traveled with Simon Cephas, The Disputation Between Peter and Nero, and The Preaching of Simon Cephas in the City of Rome. The Life of Clement who Traveled with Simon Cephas* is also known as *The Syriac Clementine Recognitions and Homilies* is a very ancient and important account of the life of Simon Peter. Two recent translations from the Aramaic, one by Joseph Glen Gebhardt and the other by F. Stanley Jones, have recently been published. Portions of Abdias along with the Syriac text and English translation of *History of Shimeon Kepha the Chief of the Apostles* is included in *The Ancient Martyrdom Accounts of Peter and Paul* by David L. Eastman. I intend to make these important accounts available to a wider audience through my “Abdias of Babylon” series.

## Reflections and prospects of our collaborative project

Assyrian Studies Association, Suraye Educational Collective



Andrew Rassam

In September 2024, the **Suraye Educational Collective** alongside the **Assyrian Studies Association** inaugurated what we dub the **Wikipedia Project**. This project aims to enhance the representation and knowledge of Assyrians on the English Wikipedia by editing and creating new articles, as well as adopting smaller scale changes and reviving a collaborative group dedicated to Assyrians called WikiProject Assyria. Assyrians (including our Chaldean and Syriac communities) are one of the groups that are represented on the website and have many articles about them and their history, but compared to other SWANA groups, there has been a considerable gap in information about the modern people over the years. We deduced three reasons as to why this may be the case.

Firstly, a lack of knowledge on Assyrians left many articles barren or outdated; editing on articles related to the Assyrian community was most active when the website was still growing, but this has very much decreased as of 2025. Even articles on topics that aren't necessarily time based (that's to say, articles based on current events or living figures) are pretty commonly left with very little information, or if there is enough information, than it usually isn't supplemented with enough sources to warrant its own article, and these types of articles are so plenty in number that it has prompted the need for editors to strengthen them. Nowadays, much has changed with Assyrians in the diaspora and the homeland, and who better to update our history than the Assyrian community?

Second, and this may come as either a big surprise or no surprise, but unfortunately, our articles have been prone to previous instances of anti-Assyrian sentiment. We hypothesized this was divided into two categories; the first involved anti-Assyrian sentiment and editing from those of a background that neighbored the Assyrian homeland, and the second involved Chaldean and Aramean separatists editing articles in an attempt to legitimize their respective movements. Of course, we can't generalize all editors that fit into these two categories (especially the latter) as having anti-Assyrian motivations when editing, and in the case of the latter, the edits that are made within that category are usually reverted or don't stick around for longer than they're present. But for many years, this issue was all over the place in our articles, so to have a way that counteracts these edits is very important.

This level of anti-Assyrian sentiment contributes to another problem, which is the potential spread of misinformation. An Assyrian journalist named Max Joseph was following a situation closely around the late 2010s/early 2020s involving a Kurdish editor from Denmark who goes by the online moniker Semsuri. According to Joseph, Semsuri would regularly edit Assyrian articles (and also Turkmen, Yezidi, and other SWANA Wikipedia pages) by altering information to deliver a pro-Kurdish sentiment or just removing whole amounts of articles altogether. On the article for the Assyrian village of Alqosh, Semsuri would get into an edit dispute with other users where he wrote that the village was annexed to the Kurdish region in northern Iraq; this is only one example of what is likely many articles, and while we can't make broad or generalized accusations, it's noteworthy that Semsuri has previously been criticized outside of Wikipedia for his edits by the Assyrian community and some other online users.

Although it may seem like Assyrians have been dealt this inherently bad hand on Wikipedia from the start, and there's certainly been these challenges that have prevented proper representation, these haven't been overall major detriments. Other than some users or instances of vandalism, most Assyrian articles on the site just need a refresh of images or information. With that being said, here are some things to note:

1. When editing articles, our philosophy is not to "right great wrongs" that Assyrians have potentially faced on Wikipedia; this is actually something that goes against Wikipedia's policies since it relies less on verifying the infor-

mation with accurate sources and historicity - since we need to work within the guidelines of Wikipedia and Wikimedia Foundation, the Wikipedia Project aims to have productive editing and discussions with other editors while still representing modern Assyrian history properly

2. We hold no bias towards a specific sect of Assyrians or other groups on Wikipedia over another; we aim to represent our culture across its diversity and incorporate all parts of our community into one representation as Assyrian people, while ensuring that we don't prioritize one over another (ex. we don't see Assyrian topics related to the ACOE, Hakkari, Tdora, etc. as more important than those relating to Chaldeans from the Nineveh Plains or the Syriac Orthodox Assyrians from Tur Abdin)
3. Lastly, we are only focusing on modern Assyrian history and topics; these are the articles that have the biggest gaps in information, and the ones that are the most necessary to change, so the scope of the Wikipedia Project will not include anything specific to ancient Assyrian/Mesopotamian history or Syriac Christianity (unless a subject has broad or distinct relation to these topics)

So far, the project has made great strides in changing the way Assyrians are represented on the site. Although it would take quite a while to go over everything, we can safely conclude that so far, our initial goals for the project have mostly been met and we are actively working on expanding articles, uploading new images, and creating a cleaner look for Suraye on the site. Although it is yet to be considered complete, we can also say that it's much easier to determine when the project will be finished and the specific articles that should be edited.

There still remain challenges to the completion of the Wikipedia Project. For one, our previous generalization of the origins of anti-Assyrian sentiment on the website turned out to be greatly overexaggerated; as it turns out, most of the recent instances of vandalism came from users or IP addresses that espoused the Aramean label, with a minority of Chaldeanists and a few Kurdish editors (but greater emphasis on the first two). From past and current observations, what seems to be a common pattern for these editors on English Wikipedia is that the types of edits they do make are usually to revert something that was once Assyrian into being "Chaldean" or "Aramean" through a simple name change; this isn't to say that Assyrian users who identify as Assyrian don't do the same thing vice versa, but by comparison, Chaldeanists and Arameanists will only make these particular edits. This leads to constant edit warring, most notably on articles about Assyrian villages in Tur Abdin and southeastern Turkey. But this could actually be part of another issue for the project.

In previous meetings, it was brought up that having the Wikipedia Project to represent Assyrians could make those who identify as Chaldean or Syriac-Aramean feel that their identities are being erased as a whole; indeed, the language in this article could be interpreted as such, but this is not our intention. In order to properly represent us, and the diversity we have in dialect, village, history, etc., we of course need to make sure that these parts of our community feel and are included. For the most part, it's been this way in the past and we've also been able to do this ourselves; like previously said, we don't hold bias over any part of the Assyrian community over another, and any edits that we do make are mostly to say that this subject is Assyrian while recounting details with accurate and verifiable sources. Most representation of Assyrians encompasses all these cultural differences and perspectives, but it's still somewhat narrow to a specific representation of Assyrians as being ACOE, having origins from certain places geographically, and following respective cultural alignments. An example can be seen with our musicians; on the English Wikipedia, a lot of the Assyrian musicians who have articles and actually sing Assyrian music fit with this representation (Evin Agassi, Sargon Gabriel, Linda George, etc.) - Chaldean singers are those who usually sing Arabic or Western music, so we don't have a lot of Assyrian singing Chaldean Catholic musicians like Munadhel Tomika or Majid Kakka, and well known Western (Suryoye) musicians like Ninib Lahdo or Habib Mousa also don't have their own articles.

If we have parts of our community feel less Assyrian than others on Wikipedia, then we're not properly doing our jobs to edit or create articles about our community. At the same time, not everyone in our community is inherently going to like the work of the project; it's not only the nature of Wikipedia, but also something that reflects one of the biggest issues our community has faced since the 20th century, which is why it's mentioned quite a bit up to now. At the end of the day, the work still needs to be put in. But you may be reading the information about the project and find it to overall be daunting and exhausting work. The question, of course, remains "Why is it so important to have a project like this?", and how does Wikipedia have a considerable advantage over other sources for Assyrians to write about themselves?

Wikipedia remains the best hub of information about who the Assyrian people are across not only our expansive history, but also the different fields of study relating to us. That means that any subject that falls under the umbrella of Aramaic (language), Syriac Christian, or Assyrian studies (Assyriology/modern Assyrians) is represented and has an article. Any subject, even if it's the most obscure person or topic that you can think of, likely has their own Wikipedia article, and it's interesting when you see how Wikipedia has built itself to be this online encyclopedia of information that many of these articles aren't actively being edited by the average user. Topics relating to Assyrians in any capacity are usually being added onto Wikipedia by Assyrians themselves, and given this decrease in editing over the years, you haven't seen much edits to previous articles or rapid creation of new articles since the early days of the site. So despite what we have available now, the level of representation of Assyrians is not currently at the level that it could be. While we also acknowledge that we can't create an article for everything, especially since we're focusing on modern Assyrians, it's at

**Simele massacre** 20 languages

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A *good article* from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia Coordinates: 36°51′30″N 42°51′0.35″E﻿ / ﻿36.85833°N 42.85009°E﻿ / 36.85833; 42.85009

The **Simele massacre** (Syriac: ܡܕܒܚܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܠܐ, romanized: *Premta d'Simele*, Arabic: مذبحة سميل, romanized: *maḡbahat Simīl*), also known as the **Assyrian affair**,<sup>[8]</sup> was a massacre committed by the Kingdom of Iraq under the leadership of Kurdish army general Bakr Sidqi. The massacre was committed against the Assyrian population of Iraq in and around the village of Simele in August 1933. The massacre took place over a four day period, and 54 villages total are said to have been targeted during this time.

The number of deaths was estimated by British officials at 600.<sup>[5]</sup> Some Assyrian estimates are higher, positing that as many as 6,000 were killed and over 100 Assyrian villages were destroyed and looted.<sup>[9][10]</sup>

**Background** [ [edit source](#) ]

**Assyrians of the mountains** [ [edit source](#) ]

The majority of the Assyrians affected by the massacres were adherents of the **Church of the East** (often dubbed *Nestorian*), who originally inhabited the mountainous Hakkari and Barwari regions covering parts of the modern provinces of Hakkāri, Şırnak and Van in Turkey and the Dohuk Governorate in Iraq, with a population ranging between 75,000 and 150,000.<sup>[11][12]</sup> Most of these Assyrians were massacred during the 1915 Assyrian genocide, at the hands of the Ottoman Turks, while the rest endured two winter marches to Urmia in 1915 and to Hamadan in 1918.

Many of them were relocated by the British to refugee camps in Baquba and later to

**Simele massacre**

Aerial view of Batarshah in northern Iraq, an Assyrian village destroyed by Arabs and Kurds in August 1933

Legend:  
 Area where villages were looted  
 Heavily targeted Assyrian villages

**Native name** مذبحة سميل (Arabic)<sup>[1]</sup>  
ܡܕܒܚܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܠܐ (Syriac)<sup>[2][3]</sup>

Screen capture from Wikipedia

the very least important to acknowledge the many articles that could be edited and created to account for this gap in information.

In fact, Wikipedia has since become such a good hub for information on Assyrians, that it even has information related to the community that probably would've been hard to find elsewhere. Articles on topics such as politics, culture, history, etc. may not be perfect, but it's enough to the point that scholars in Assyrian studies may benefit from such articles. They have just the type of information that someone in, say political science, may be looking for, and without Wikipedia as a hub to have this information, it may have stayed hidden in the depths of history such that only those on the ground would've known how these events truly played out. But the root that it all traces back to is that having a project like this ultimately contributes to the larger goal of helping our people to understand more about who we are as Assyrians. Many of the most frequented articles for our people are also some of the best for them to learn more about their heritage, identity, and history, and while it may sound repetitive to keep saying it in this way, it truly shows that Wikipedia has so far made that huge of an impact on the Assyrian people today.

If you're interested in helping with the Wikipedia Project, or have ideas for an article that should be made, please reach out to [surayeatuniversity@gmail.com](mailto:surayeatuniversity@gmail.com) and [info@assyrianstudiesassociation.org](mailto:info@assyrianstudiesassociation.org)! Please note that if you choose to volunteer for the project, you must have time to dedicate to editing articles and the ability to consistently communicate with SEC and the ASA before being brought on board for the project.

April is National Poetry Month, and the Assyrian Cultural Foundation of Chicago have translated Freydoun Atouraya's famous poem Qala D'Qarna or "The Call of the Horn."

**The Call of the Horn**  
**مَكْر دِبْدَتْن**

The call of the horn  
 The voice of those who have sacrificed  
 Calling out by  
 Infants of centuries passed  
 Come to us, our exhausted sons  
 For you we suffered  
 From Mesopotamia  
 Ancient homeland  
 To the great western sea  
 From the high Tigris, Khabur, and Zawa  
 Let us raise our Assyrian nation

AN ASSYRIAN POEM BY  
**FREYDOUN ATOURAYA**









הנהלת המטה הלאומית תתקבץ לראשונה ביום שישי  
במסגרת פגישת עבודה, וזוהי הפגישה הראשונה

במהלך הפגישה יתקיימו דיונים חשובים  
הכוללים את תוכנית הפעולה השנתית, המטרות  
העיקריות והאחריות של כל אחד מהמשתתפים

הפגישה תתקיים ביום שישי, 15.08.2014  
בשעה 18:00 בבניין המטה הלאומי, רמת השרון

הנהלת המטה הלאומית תתקבץ לראשונה  
ביום שישי, 15.08.2014, בשעה 18:00 בבניין המטה הלאומי, רמת השרון

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# تلمیذان کلاسیک

کتاب نمونہ کلاسیک

پیشہ 6770

تعمیراتی منصوبہ ڈیزائن کیلئے

پہلے مرحلے کے ڈیزائن کیلئے

دستور کے تحت کہ عمارت کا ڈیزائن، فضا کی

تعمیراتی ڈیزائن میں شمولیت کیلئے

کہ پلان میں ڈیزائن کے لیے ڈیزائن

کتاب کیلئے ڈیزائن کے لیے ڈیزائن

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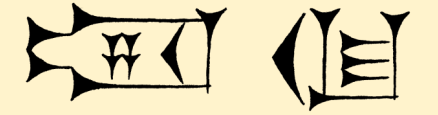
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پیشہ 6770 - کلاسیک

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# کلاسیک



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63..... کلاسیک ڈیزائن

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# ܣܠܥܐ

ܒܢܝ ܩܘܪܥܐܢ | ܒܢܝ ܩܘܪܥܐܢ | ܒܢܝ ܩܘܪܥܐܢ ܒܢܝ



ܡܠܟܐ ܩܘܪܥܐܢ ܩܘܪܥܐܢ ܩܘܪܥܐܢ