

THE ROLE OF MINORITIES IN THE STATE:
HISTORY OF THE ASSYRIAN EXPERIENCE

A THESIS
PRESENTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

by

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JULY 15, 1976

"THE ROLE OF MINORITIES IN THE STATE:
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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Mr. William S. Daniel, the distinguished Assyrian epic writer and a scholar in Syriac for providing me with valuable information and material, and for his suggestions with respect to clarification of ambiguities in the text; to Dr. L. E. Sweet for her encouragement and constructive criticism, and to the Assyrians of "Plains City" for their unreserved cooperation in my research work.

The names of people and places in the Assyrian colony in North America are changed to protect the identity of the community members.

For the benefit of the reader I would like to identify myself. I was born in the town of Urmiya, Iran where I lived as a child. I am a member of the Assyrian community.

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ABSTRACT

This is a study in pluralism. It deals with the question of how to account for the persistence of ethnic minorities in the evolution of the state. The case of an ancient minority group - the Assyrians - is examined here. The name "Assyrian" brings to the mind of the readers an ancient empire which is extinct now. As this paper indicates, there is still a small ethnic group which is called Assyrian. The data for this study was gathered through first hand research in an Assyrian emigrant colony in Canada, by correspondence with Assyrians in the Middle East and the United States, and by library research.

The persistence of the Assyrian minority is examined in terms of the external political environment; that is, the policies of the states in which the Assyrians have been found, and in the internal structure of the minority group itself. It is argued that the divide and rule policy of the pre-Islamic middle Eastern states, as manifested in the millet system, kept the different minorities as social isolates. The internal factors are found in the continuation of the peasant mode of adaptation and its associated social and ideological features such as localism and traditionalism.

Present day militancy of minority groups as expressed in the Assyrian nationalism, is attributed to the active policy of Western industrial Capitalist or quasi socialist

states that promote multiculturalism. It is also attributed to the effort of nationalist minded Assyrians to overcome their social, economic, and political disadvantages.

PART I

ASSYRIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Current Research on Minority Groups

The shift from melting pot and assimilation theories to pluralism and the persistence of minority groups does not seem to have altered essentially the substance of social science research on minority groups. The research programs in both cases are limited in scope and perspective. In both cases usually the inventory of cultural traits constitutes the primary data, and the ratio of borrowed to indigenous traits seems to provide the final answer. (For a recent example of this type of research see A. Anderson 1975).

After reading the literature on the assimilation or persistence of minority groups in North America, one is still left with the question of how to account for either phenomenon in a more general fashion; since the explanations given - if any - are so specific and usually unidimensional that the formulation of a generalized outlook becomes impossible. Any of the following factors for instance, are invoked to account for the persistence of specific minority groups: religion, strong kinship ties, value system, occupational specialization, or successful ecological adaptation. Current emphasis on the conflicting group

interests or attitudes (viewed subjectively) as an explanation of the persistence of pluralism also leaves much room for debate (See F. Cunningham 1975-1976:385-416). As Cunningham points out, "interests" or "attitudes" are secondary, consequential phenomenon and their underlying causes need to be explained.

At present there are a few studies in which a structural and evolutionary approach has been adopted, and in the case of North America for instance, minority groups have been analyzed within the general context of stratified and industrial nation states (See P. Diener 1974:601-617). This type of research enables the reader to comprehend that the underlying causes for the "assimilation" or the "persistence" of minority groups must be sought in the economic process; that is, in the differential access of groups to sources and means of production. Thus viewed, the two processes of assimilation and/or the persistence of ethnic groups become understandable within the single and general theory of class struggle in the historical materialist tradition.

The Purpose Of This Thesis

This paper deals with the Assyrian communities in the old Middle Eastern and modern Western industrial states. It is intended to follow the theoretical framework which was briefly mentioned in the above paragraph.

This paper is also intended to be an addition to the meager collection of research on Middle Eastern communities

in North America. Moreover, it deals with an ethnic group which has proved to be an illusive subject for the western scholar. This is mainly because the Assyrians are known as a religious rather than an ethnic group; and since they belong to different Christian denominations, they are referred to in English accounts by the different names of Catholic Chaldeans, Jacobites, Nestorians, Syriac speaking Christians, Assyrians... In addition, they are widely dispersed in small communities all over the world. Western scholars look upon the latter as ethnically different communities and those who have carried on research on Assyrians in North America have treated each community in isolation. They have therefore, missed the social and historical ties which bind each community with others of a different name and locality, and have thus presented a fragmentary if not misleading picture.

This study will trace the experiences of the Assyrians as a minority group within stratified social systems ranging over history from the archaic pre-Christian empires of the Middle East to the Islamic era and finally to modern nation states. It will explore some of the mechanisms employed by the old and modern states to control or exploit the power of significant minority groups - in this case Assyrians - living within their boundaries. It will also analyze the methods used by this minority group to preserve its identity and its human and material resources from

further encroachment.

A survey of the history of this minority group brings to light the dilemma faced by the ruling classes in complex nation states: they must attempt to prevent the existence of any significant and distinct group which constitutes an "unintegrated" element within the system, and which therefore has the potential of challenging the prerogatives of the power structure; and yet the rulers of the state produce those very groups by dint of exclusive claim on both the means of aggression and strategic resources that sustain the whole.

Methods of Data Collection

Various methods have been used to collect data for the different chapters in this thesis.

The data on the Assyrian colony in Western Canada was collected through first hand research. Family histories of the individuals in the community were collected through personal interview during a two weeks residence with one of the Assyrian families in "Plains City." Subsequent visits enabled me to obtain further data of a general nature. Considerable information on daily life and contact between community members was also gathered by the method of participant observation.

To obtain information on the Assyrians in the United States, a questionnaire was distributed among twenty individuals in the State of California. Unfortunately only

three individuals mailed their answers back; but this is not surprising: Assyrians do not respond easily to formal and unfamiliar procedures, although they most willingly talk about themselves during friendly and informal occasions.

Two of the Assyrian periodicals published in the United States were valuable sources of information, and have been read faithfully.

Another method of obtaining data has been personal communication through mail with knowledgeable people in Iran and the United States.

For the remaining chapters information was collected through library research. Three types of sources: English, Assyrian, and Persian were examined and a variety of subjects were covered such as: Anthropological theory, literature on the history of Assyrians, the history of Iran, the settlement of Western Canada, and the recent history and political developments in the Middle East.

Available Data On Assyrians In North America

To my knowledge, no research within the anthropological or sociological tradition has been carried out as yet on the Assyrian minorities in the Middle East. As to Assyrians in North America, I am aware of only two studies.

The first is a comparative analysis of a Druze* and an Assyrian community in Flint, Michigan published in 1941-1942 by Dr. E. D. Beynon. His research findings indicated that the Assyrians were the most impoverished community - with the exception of Negroes - in Flint. The Druze, on the other hand, belonged to the wealthy and successful class of the city. He attributes the economic failure of the first group partly to the nature of their occupation which was production work in the auto industry characterized by seasonal employment and periodical layoffs; and partly to their attitudes - such as lack of a spirit of mutual help, pauperized expectations, a passive, and fatalistic spirit. The economic success of the Druzes is attributed to their frugality and a spirit of mutual assistance which enabled them to start with small beginnings and successfully establish and handle a large part of the retail grocery trade in Flint. Needless to say such simplistic interpretation of ethnic group differences indicate very little except the author's own bias.

The second is a Ph D dissertation on a community of "Iraqi Christians" in Detroit, Michigan completed in 1967. It deals with the mutually reinforcing function of a

*The Druze are a Muslim religious sect. The nucleus of the Druze community is in the mountain regions of the Levant where they live as farmers and pastoralists. Colonies of the Druze people are found in other Middle Eastern and Western countries.

specialized community occupation - grocery business in this case - and kinship ties, and how the two operate to preserve the identity of this immigrant community.

Both of these studies are examples of sociological research in its fragmentary and superficial aspect. None of them attempts a thorough historical analysis within the framework of a comprehensive sociological theory which would enable the reader to draw some generalizations beyond these specific ethnic groups to other ethnic minorities in North America. It would have been fruitful for instance, to have analyzed the position of these immigrant Assyrian groups within the North American socio-political structure, and studied the extent to which state policies promote cohesion or fragmentation within such immigrant groups.

Some useful descriptive data on the history of Assyrian immigration to Turlock and surrounding towns in the state of California is found in H. A. Hohenthal's Streams In A Thirsty Land: A History of the Turlock Region 1972; and Victoria Yonan's A History Of The Assyrian People In The Turlock Community 1962.

CHAPTER II

CONTEMPORARY ASSYRIANS:

FROM MIDDLE EAST TO THE WORLD AT LARGE

Demography, Distribution, Composition

The people who refer to themselves by the name Assyrian today constitute a distinct and exclusive ethnic group. Membership in the Assyrian community is by birth or marriage to an Assyrian. As a Christian minority living among a predominantly Muslim population, the community has had a long standing and distinct history, which will become clear in the forthcoming chapters.

At present Assyrians have an estimated population of one million people. Geographically they are widely distributed among several Middle Eastern and Western countries. The countries with the greatest number of Assyrian population are Iraq, Syria, and Iran in the Middle East; and the United States of America in the West. The chart on the next page represents estimates of Assyrian population distribution in a few countries.

ESTIMATES OF ASSYRIAN POPULATION
DISTRIBUTION IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	NUMBERS	SOURCE	YEAR
Iraq	535,000	MATHIBANA .	1974
Syria	40,000-50,000	BET NAHRAIN	II: 1975
Iran	32,000	IRAN ALMANAC	1974
Turkey	30,000	MATHIBANA	1971
Russia	24,000	STAR	No.4:1972
Australia	8,000	Pers. Comm.	1975
Greece	2,000	MATHIBANA	1973
England	200 families	STAR	No.5:1974
Germany	800 families	as above -----	
Holland	50 families	as above -----	
Sweden	665	MATHIBANA	1971
U.S.A.	150,000	Mr. W. Daniel	1976

Accurate population figures are not available on the Assyrians since in most countries they are not listed as a separate ethnic group. The above data is based on estimates found in various Assyrian periodicals such as Mathibana, Bet Nahrain, and The Assyrian Star.

There are also a few communities in other Middle Eastern countries in Canada, and in South America about whom little is published.

Assyrians are divided among several Christian denominations. Two main divisions and their derivatives are:

- A.) The "Church of the East" known as the "Nestorian Church" with its Uniate "Chaldean" offshoot and all of its Russian Orthodox, and Protestant (Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Baptist) branches.
- B.) The "Jacobite Church" with its Uniate offshoot: the "Syrian Catholic Church."

The mother tongue of Assyrians is Syriac, a branch of the Aramaic language. It has developed into different dialects reflecting local variation; but "Classical Syriac," the language of liturgy remains unchanged and was used invariably during church services until the turn of this century. It is still the language of liturgy in the older denominations such as the Church of the East and the Jacobite Church.

The territorial basis of the Nestorian Assyrians before World War I was a triangular area between Lake Van, Lake Urmiya, and the town of Mosul. This was a border area between Ottoman Turkey and Persia. The Assyrians were in the main a pastoral and peasant community with an autonomous nucleus that held blocks of mountain territory

in the Hakkari Highlands while satellite outposts were located on the plains of Mosul, Van, Salmas, and Urmiya. Just before World War I they numbered about 115,800 people. (Rockwell 1916:69).

The Jacobites were either town dwellers or small landholding or sharecropping peasants. Jacobite centers were located mainly in Ottoman Turkey;* in the following cities with their surrounding hinterland village communities: Diarbakir with six villages; Urfa (Urhai in Syriac) with fifty villages; Damascus with four villages; Jebel Tur with about one hundred and fifty villages; Mosul with five villages; Harpout with fifteen villages; District of Gavar; and the cities of Baghdad, Mardin and Aleppo. The total population numbered about 250,000 (Perley 1935:107).

Religious divisions kept the Nestorian and Jacobite-Assyrians apart at the time.

Minority Status and Ethnic Identity

The history of the Assyrians as a minority points to the interesting phenomenon that in situations where ethnic groups meet on unequal grounds, like a minority group within a state, the elements in the cultural inventory that are singled out to define the minority category are determined by the ruling powers rather than by the minority group

*Before World War I this included the dominantly Arab countries of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Arabia, etc.

itself. It is within the limitations imposed by the power structure that the minority group has to find room to manipulate its status to advantage.

The millet* system which was established in the Middle East by the Sassanid Persian rulers as early as the third century A.D. and which continued during the Islamic era until the turn of the twentieth century, identified minority categories on the basis of religion rather than other ethnic criterion. Consequently distinctions between descent groups or linguistic divisions were down played in dealings with the state institutions. The minority group under analysis came to constitute a religious millet and found itself situated between rival states. Accordingly it maintained considerable flexibility in its organizational make up so as to be able to manipulate the status conferred upon it to its own advantage. While effective in guaranteeing a measure of political security, this flexibility resulted in the fragmentation of the group. The multiplicity of designations by which this minority group is referred to such as Syrian, Nestorian, Jacobite, Chaldean, Assyrian... are an indication of the organizational change and shift in alliance that it has undergone

*The millet organization was one by which minorities were given legal recognition as "inferior" subjects, and were ruled through their own representatives. These were, without exception, the ecclesiastical leaders...

at one time or another during its history for political reasons (a more detailed survey is found in Chapter III).

At the turn of this century the politico-economic influences which were gradually transforming the social structure of the Ottoman Turkey and Persia culminated in the breakdown of these Islamic states.* New states were erected in their place on the basis of secular national characteristics after the European model. The minority groups within these states had to adapt to these changes too. Fragments of the shattered Ottoman and Persian millets reorganized on the basis of ethnic and linguistic background. The "Assyrians" emerged as the remnants of an age old ethnic group in the area. World War I sealed the identity of the Assyrian nation who took part in this international drama on the side of the allied powers. The War presented the Assyrians with an opportunity to act as one people and share the same fate. Whatever the consequences, the Assyrian nation was reborn and officially recognized on the international level by name if nothing else.

The term "Assyrian" at present defines this minority group in terms of its ethnic and territorial origin. This,

*After World War I the Western imperialist states consolidated their power in the Middle East by dividing the Ottoman domain into smaller secular states such as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, etc., which then became either British or French mandates.

in combination with two other cultural features, namely religion and language, form the boundaries which distinguish it from other local groups in the Middle East.

The Basis Of The Claim To Assyrian Identity

The present day Assyrians claim that anyone whose mother tongue is Syriac and is referred to as "Syrian Christian" is in fact an Assyrian in a national sense. Among this group are included not only the Chaldeans, Jacobites, and Nestorians, with their Protestant offshoots, but also the Maronites (Surma-d-Bait Mar Shimun 1920:66). However, at present only members of the first three groups identify themselves by the name Assyrian; the Maronites do not.

The claim to Assyrian identity is based on the fact that these people are age old inhabitants of the ancient Assyria, and still retain a language considerably more archaic than Arabic. Thus they consider the region which is now part of Northern Iraq as their homeland. Ideologically, the Assyrian name and the symbols associated with the cultural attainments of this ancient civilization provide a sense of worth and a basis for solidarity among the Assyrian people.

The Christian forefathers of present day Assyrians referred to themselves by the name "Sūryāye" or "Sūrāye" (Syrian in English) until the turn of this century. The

meaning of this term has been a subject of controversy. During the old Islamic rule this term meant only one thing: "Christian" in general. The "Nestorians" used it in a more specific sense to refer only to themselves and to "Jacobites" (Maclean & Browne 1892:7). As a locality, "Syria" was strictly the country around Antioch, but the name was usually applied to the country eastward to the Tigris (Maclean & Browne 1892:7). This indeed includes Assyria proper, and most of the area constituted part of the ancient oriental Assyrian domain during the greater part of the Assyrian rule (2000-612 B.C.). Thus the people who are referred to as "Syrian Christians" are not necessarily from the country which is known today as "Syria." In fact some of the Eastern and Western scholars have argued that the term "Syrian" and "Assyrian" are actually the same. According to Mār Tūmā Odu (?-1918), a learned Assyrian scholar in classical Syriac, the word "Syrian" is a Greek corruption of the name "Assyrian." John Joseph, who challenges this theory, points out that in classical Syriac "Syrian" and "Assyrian" are always differentiated by two distinct words: "Suryaya" and "Aturaya" and so they are two different words (Joseph 1961:13). On the other hand, Mār Tūmā Odū states that these two words denote a difference in dialects and not in meaning. He demonstrates that in many cases the sound th in one Aramaic dialect changes to the sound s in

another, such as: (Sarmas 1965:69).

Athuraya	Asuraya	(Assyrian)
Othman	Osman	(Ottoman)
Alahoutha	Alahousa	(Godly)
Meetha	Meesa	(dead)

John Joseph does not seem to agree with this theory but he cannot disprove it. He writes:

While the word Suraya, or Suryaya in its classical form, does not mean inhabitants of Syria, neither does it mean Assyrian, as some Syriac scholars have written...Well-known scholars today think that the two words are of completely different origin even though it remains for future historians to prove the correctness of the theory (Joseph 1961:12).

As to the Greeks and their confusion of the terms "Syrian" and "Assyrian," Herodotus is an example. He states: "These people whom the Greeks call Syrians, are called Assyrians by the Barbarians" (Perley 1962:18).

The present day Assyrians' claim that they speak the Assyrian language, is based upon the fact that Syriac is a descendant of the Aramaic language, and that Aramaic had completely replaced Akkadian as the written and spoken language of the ancient Assyrians by the seventh century B.C. (Encyclopedia Britannica (Micropaedia) 1974:1:177). Although many other people besides the ancient Assyrians spoke Aramaic, the fact is that the modern Aramaic-speaking inhabitants of ancient Assyria and Babylonia are also indigeous to the area (Encyclopedia Americana 1972:24:549). Hence the

connection between the language and the people is clear. Both have persisted in situ for three millenia in spite of, for example, the Arabization that took place after the Islamic expansion of the seventh-eighth centuries A.D.

According to Christian traditions, the inhabitants of Assyria and Babylonia were among the first communities to embrace Christianity. Assemani writes "The Chaldeans or Assyrians recieved Christianity in the time of the twelve Apostles" (Perley 1962:8-9:19). The Assyrian Christians maintain that Christianity was introduced to them by Thadaeus (Addi in Syriac), and St. Thomas. That the Assyrians accepted Christianity readily, is interpreted as a form of protest or defiance towards the alien Roman and Persian rule (Perley in Malik 1935:111). Whatever the reason, the spread of Christianity particularly in Persian territory was facilitated among the Aramaic speaking people due to linguistic familiarity and the toleration of the Parthian kings, who ruled over Assyria and Persia at the time. The legacy of the ancient Assyrian Christians in this area is preserved in the form of the early churches bearing Aramaic names and having stylistic resemblance to the old Babylonian temples. As early as 225 A.D. when the Sassanian king Ardashir took over the rule of Persia from the last Parthian ruler, he found various strong Christian communities in his empire and recognized them as a millet, that is, "a subject race of

the Empire" (Stewart 1961:3). The millet system was superimposed on communities who were ethnically of different backgrounds to each other. The question is whether the reorganization of different ethnic groups into a single millet did in fact obliterate completely such differences or not. The Assyrian Christians today claim that it did not. Although as a single Assyrian Christian millet ethnic identity was no longer relevant to be publicized, yet the different communities remained localized endogamous units preserving their local language and identity. For instance we read that the Zoroastrian Persian converts to Christianity spoke Pahlavi, or middle Persian (Stewart 1961:5). Similarly Assyrians or Chaldeans - the two names have been used popularly as equivalents - (Joseph 1961:8) did not cease to be aware of who their forefathers were. For instance Tatian and Prepon, who were both among the second century Christian scholars, distinguished themselves as "Assyrian Theologians" (Perley 1962:17); Tatian is identified as "an Assyrian by birth" (Vine 1937:188).

In the church of Biriji among the Assyrians of Tkhoma in Turkish Kurdistan, Layard found a copy of the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles on vellum written in the year of the Seleucidea 1552 (thirteenth century) which was marked: written in the time of "Mar Audishio Patriarch of the East, and of the Chaldeans (Layard I:1844:200). Layard has also claimed that he found on the tombs of

Nestorian Patriarchs the inscription, "Patriarch of the Chaldeans and of the East." But Badger has claimed that he has made a careful examination of the inscriptions on the tombs and all that he could find was the inscription: "Patriarchs and Occupants of the Throne of Addi and Mari" (Joseph 1961:10). Although Badger was a semitic scholar, yet he does not seem to have been a thorough investigator, as he has also claimed that there are no architectural or monumental records indicating a longer residence of "Nestorians" in Kurdistan than Tamerlane's time (Maclean & Browne 1892:298). Yet some of the very architectural structures Badger visited such as the old Nestorian churches in Kurdistan had inscriptions indicating that they predated the advent of Mohammed (Surma d' bait Mar Shimun 1920:2; Joseph 1961:23). The best proof that the Nestorian Assyrians were indeed aware of their ethnic background is found in John Joseph's Ph D dissertation in which, ironically enough, he has devoted a chapter to prove that the claim of present day Assyrians that they are the descendants of the Assyrians of antiquity is unfounded. According to him the name "Assyrian" as an ethnic designation in reference to Nestorians is a nineteenth century invention propagated by Fletcher, Layard, and Wigram. Yet a passage in his own book indicates that "Nestorians" were aware of, and claimed to be of "Chaldean" or "Assyrian" origin long before the advent of nineteenth century

western writers. The passage deals with the Uniate schism in the Nestorian church. After the schism, he asserts, the Roman Catholic Church began, in the seventeenth century, to refer to its new adherents by the name "Chaldean" in a national sense in order to distinguish them from Nestorians who remained faithful to the old Church. Then we read, "When the terms Chaldean and Nestorian were thus differentiated, the members of the non-Uniate church, claiming the same relationship to the inhabitants of ancient Babylon as their Catholic Brethren, began to use the name Chaldean" (Joseph 1961:10).

Controversy Over The Assyrian Identity

The use of the name Assyrian by the members of the present day minority group has seemed objectionable in some social science circles. Most writers have made only a passing comment on the issue (See Maclean & Browne 1892: 6-9; Beynon 1944:260; Husry 1974:166). To date John Joseph's treatment of the subject is by far the most comprehensive and will be therefore used here as the major source. The objection dwells upon two issues: the first questions the validity of the claim to Assyrian descent in reference to "Nestorians." The second, which is directly related to the first, deals with the question of cultural continuity and racial purity; issues which have become outmoded as criteria for the scientific analysis of ethnic group continuity in Anthropology (Barth 1969:

9-38). However, let us examine these objections at their face value.

The objection most commonly raised to the use of the name in its contemporary sense is that the people who claim to be the descendants of ancient Assyrians began to call themselves by this name only at the turn of this century. Until then they called themselves "Sūrāye" or "Sūryāye" (Syrian), meaning simply, "Christian." J. Joseph, who raises the same objection, states that the terms "Chaldean" was never applied in reference to these people as an ethnic name; it was applied only in a religious sense. This objection is revealing of the Western trained historians' ethnocentrism. Knowing the social structure of Ottoman Islamic society, it would have been strange if these people had been categorized as an ethnic group. The millet status was a religious category and not an ethnic one; descent or linguistic characteristics were irrelevant to the rulers or state as criterion of group identity. For instance, the term "Armenian" referred to a type of Christianity rather than ethnicity. The Armenian millet was the millet of "heretics" so to speak from the point of view of Christian Orthodoxy. It included not only the Armenian speaking monophysites, but also the Nestorians, the Jacobites, and Catholics whose communal languages were not Armenian at all (Gibb & Bowen 1:1957:232). Thus the legal status of the millets was popularly known and

politically significant, but internal diversities in the minorities were not of prime significance to non-members. As late as the middle of this century the term "Armani" was used in some of the villages of Persian Azerbaijan in reference to both Assyrians and Armenians simply to mean that they were "Christian." Or Bulgarians were never mentioned by their ethnic name while they were under the Ottoman rule. Indeed "Their very existence as a people was unknown in Europe even by specialists in Slavonic literature" (Gibb and Bowen 1957:234). But this does not mean that the people themselves had invariably ceased to be aware of themselves as a distinct ethnic group. As to the Assyrians, and their neighbors the Armenians and the Kurds for instance, they were not only aware of themselves as a distinct religious group, but also as a separate linguistic and territorial unit. Because such distinctions did exist, and were significant in inter-group relations. Moreover, as far as historical evidence can tell us, Assyrians identified themselves by the name "Chaldean" not in a religious, but in a "kinship" sense. As already noted, they used the term to claim that they were related to the "inhabitants of ancient Babylon" (Joseph 1961:10). This, of course, does not mean that they looked upon themselves at the time as a "nation" in the modern sense of the word. The doctrine of nationalism as

expressed in the principle of "sovereignty" or "self determination" was introduced by the Europeans to the Middle East at the turn of this century. It is only in this respect that we can speak of Assyrians and for that matter, all the other modern "nations" in the Middle East as "new": in their emergence as a "nation" in the modern sense of the word. As such the Assyrians acquired an important political significance in the area. A good deal of propaganda type literature was published about them in Western accounts some of which went so far as to establish physiognomic similarities between the "Nestorians" and the ancient Assyrian sculptural representations (See Joseph 1961:16). All this helped the British government shortly after World War I to make the Assyrian territorial rights an issue to argue before the League of Nations for the alienation of the oil rich Mosul district from Turkey and its annexation to Iraq, the British newly acquired mandate.

In surveying the literature on the Assyrians, it is therefore wise to distinguish between the propaganda element and ethno-historic facts.

With respect to the question of racial and cultural continuity, Joseph argues that the present day Assyrians have no distinctive physiognomic or cultural characteristics which can be called exclusively Assyrian. The Middle East according to him is a racial and cultural "melting pot":

...the Arabs of modern Iraq very wisely and correctly claim to be the descendants of all the great ancient peoples of the East, whether Assyrian, Sumerian, Hurrian or Akkadian. This is the only kind of claim that the Nestorian Christians can make. They are not only Assyrians but an amalgamation of all the rest: because Christianity and the Syriac language molded peoples together just as Islam and the Arabic language did later on (Joseph 1962:13).

But Dr. Joseph soon contradicts his "melting pot" theory:

We can state with certainty that the Nestorians have preserved their ethnic state practically as it existed at the time of the Arab conquest, since inter-marriage of Christians with Muslims implied conversion to Islam (Joseph 1961:21).

Moreover, we find that these "Nestorians" were preserving their "ethnic state" even before the Arab conquest.

Joseph quotes Wigram to the following effect:

In Sassanian Persia we find that when his flock had diminished, the bishop urged all young people to marry and produce children to make up its members, instead of preaching the Gospel with the object of winning converts from outside (Joseph 1961:20-21).

This brings us back to the time when the "ethnic state" of the "Nestorians," according to John Joseph, was a mixture of Assyrian, Sumerian and Akkadian. If it is continuity through descent that John Joseph is after, then his own account is the best testimony that any group can provide to substantiate its claim to a specific origin. But he appears to be completely confused as to what constitutes

an ethnic group in the first place. This is his description of the "Nestorians:"

Strictly speaking, they are members of a cultural rather than an ethnic group, molded together into a nationality by ties of a common language and until the last century, a common church membership which, until the birth of the modern nation states in the Middle East, was the strongest tie among men. They are a mixture of races and it is possible that they have Assyrian blood in their veins, especially certain sections of the community, just as other sections have Persian, Kurdish, and Aramaean blood (Joseph 1961:21).

The Politics of Identity

In an age when old nations are torn down and new ones erected often on criterion other than racial or cultural unity, it seems anomalous to put the Assyrians of today to the test of proving the extent to which they are racially and culturally "Assyrian." This appears to be yet another form of molesting a minority group. That the controversy over the Assyrian identity is purely a political matter is evident from the fact that the neighbors of Assyrians in the Middle East like Iranians, Armenians, Kurds, Russians, as well as numerous Western countries recognize the Assyrian minority by the name, while the government of Iraq refers to these same people as "Syriac speaking Christians." It seems that one way of doing away with ethnic minorities and their claim to internal autonomy and cultural rights is to deny their very

existence.

Politics aside, the problem with the social scientists who make racial and cultural continuity or discontinuity criteria for determining ethnic persistence and the lack of it, is that they ignore the fact that ethnic categories are ascriptive symbols which delineate and distinguish the boundaries of groups in relation to each other rather than the cultural or racial "contents" of the groups. It is for this reason that ethnic groups persist inspite of considerable infiltration of racial and cultural traits across them.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL SURVEY

Pre-Islamic Era

The history of Assyrians as a minority group is closely associated with Christianity. But as a Christian minority they do not have a unitary history, since through time they became fragmented into different denominations and between different states. Here only the history of Assyrian Christians called stigmatically by the name "Nestorians" is traced.¹

As mentioned earlier, Christianity spread rapidly among Aramaic speaking people. By the second century A.D. the locus of Christianity in Persia was in Kurdistan and Mesopotamia from whence it extended down to the Persian Gulf. The Christian minority was tolerated in Persia as long as Rome remained officially a non-Christian power, and the Christian minority remained small and politically insignificant. The native Christians enjoyed a "millet" status and were joined by Christian refugees from the Eastern Roman Empire. The Sassanian rulers deemed it advantageous to protect the Christian refugees who were regarded as "rebels from Rome," Rome being Persia's foremost enemy. But both these factors had changed by the end of the fourth century. The Christian minority had grown

in numbers. Moreover, it had found adherents among influential members of the Persian hierarchy. This antagonized the Mazdean (Zoroastrian) Priesthood and the Persian nobility, who began to feel insecure with respect to the growing power of the Christians. We are told that the king could not ignore the power of these two segments of the ruling class if he wanted to keep his throne safe (Stewart 1961:26-27). During the rule of Shapur II (310-379), Rome, too, had become officially Christian and when war broke out between the two empires, the first massive Christian persecution followed upon a firman issued by the king demanding that the Christians pay double taxes as a contribution to war (Stewart 1961:19). The coincidence between war with Rome and persecution of Christians at home which developed into a recurrent pattern was motivated by the suspicion that the Christian subjects might take the side of the enemy because of religious loyalty. It was also triggered by the need to raise funds for the military expeditions, because these persecutions entailed confiscation of extensive areas of church and private properties alongside with other accessory wealth (Vine 1937:67). The persecutions served a third purpose too. They appeased the Mazdean Priesthood and the nobility by weakening the Christian minority. The spread of Nestorianism into the far corners of India, China, Japan, and Arabia was not only due to Nestorian missionary zeal, but also a result of

these persecutions which led the uprooted people, be it lay or clergy, to search for a home in foreign countries.

The Independence Of The Persian Church

What made the status of Christians in Persia politically precarious was that the Persian Church was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Antioch, situated in Roman territory.² The Persian Christians realized that it would be more prudent to sever their ties with Christianity abroad in order to insure the Persian government of their loyalty, and consequently gain a measure of security. The Persian government in turn saw it advisable to grant its Christian subjects security in order not to give them cause to seek the protection or friendship of their coreligionists across the border (Vine 1937:64). The first organizational change that took place in the Persian Church was purely administrative. It was effected in the Synod of Markabta in 424, when the independent Persian Patriarchate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was organized and declared as the final authority over the entire Christian body under the Persian rule. From that date on the "millet" system was officially consolidated and its members came to be recognized as a subject minority ruled through the intermediary of its religious head who served as the official link with the civil power. This also meant that the candidate for the office of Patriarchate had to be approved and at times selected by the king of

Persia. The administrative separation was followed and compounded by the acceptance of the Nestorian theology in 484, and confirmed again in 498, as the official doctrine of the Persian Church. From this point on the Persian Church became a direct adversary of the Roman Church in doctrine. To the horror of Rome and other Christian centers, a further step was taken: the rule of celibacy which applied to the higher ranks of clergy such as bishops and metropolitans was abolished to please the Zoroastrian clergy who considered celibacy religiously repugnant.

That the compromise served its ends only partially is evident in that the Christians continued to constitute a suspect minority and their life and property were not always safe. The reason for this can be sought in the millet system itself which defined the Christians as an inferior section of Persian population and made them subject to extra taxation and numerous other sumptuary laws. The caste system thus created prevented the integration of Christians into the Persian community and left them apart as a class of potential or actual "malcontents." Nevertheless their recognition as a millet, albeit an inferior one, was a great improvement over the previous precarious situation. In fact after the establishment of the independent Persian Patriarchate, the Christians in Persia prospered and except for occasional persecutions, this country became a haven for refugees

who were considered heretical by Roman Orthodoxy. In 498 when Emperor Zeno persecuted the Nestorians and ordered the theological school at Edessa to be destroyed, the Nestorian remnant fled to Persia and were well received by the native Nestorians. In spite of the objections raised by the Zoroastrian clergy, they were tolerated by the Persian authorities (Vine 1937:42; Gibb 1957:228). This pattern was repeated when monophysite "heresy" became condemned in Roman territory. Again large numbers of Jacobite monophysites were transferred from the Roman territory by the Persian rulers and were settled in different parts of the country (Stewart 1961:12). During the sixth century the Nestorian Patriarchate was the largest among all other Christian hierarchies; its boundaries extended beyond Persia into India, China, Japan and Arabia. The "Nestorians" in Persia sought an avenue for economic mobility by specializing as physicians, scribes, teachers, and translators. The latter translated texts from Greek into Syriac and Pahlavi or vice versa.

Islamic Era

During the Arab invasion Nestorian ecclesiastical leaders, in the hope of striking a better deal with the Arab rulers, helped the enemy rather than their Sassanid overlords. After the Arab conquest thousands crossed the millet barrier by accepting Islam, and thus becoming members of the privileged class. To make Islam attractive

to non-Muslims, the immediate successors to Mohammad's rule exempted the converts from paying the extra taxation levied on non-Muslims (These were Kharaj: tax on land; and Jizyah: poll tax levied in lieu of military service). But since many converts came over to Islam, the treasury was depleted and Kharaj was reinstated on non-Arab Muslim converts (Vine 1937:90).

The Arab conquest of Persia (651) did not change the status of the Christians as defined by the Sassanid rulers. The Christians were tolerated as inferior subjects and continued to be subject to certain acts of duress such as extra taxation (both Kharaj and Jizyah) and distinctive wear. They were also prohibited from carrying weapons, riding on horseback, building houses higher than those of Muslims, or erecting new churches. Legally the evidence of a Christian against a Muslim was void, and Christian men were not to seek marriage with Muslim women; although the reverse was permitted. However, the Arab rulers upon their conquest of the large Persian urban centers, did not know the local practices of administering their newly acquired state. As the Christians had helped them in their conquest, they were consequently employed in government offices as clerks, scribes, and professional experts. This enabled a segment of the Nestorian Christians to acquire wealth and prestige. In time the Nestorians came to constitute a rich millet and were given preferential treatment

by the Arab rulers. The Nestorian Patriarch had jurisdiction not only over his own people, but also over all the other Christian denominations such as the Jacobites, the Melkites, and the "Rum" (Orthodox Christians) within the territory ruled by the Arabs. The wealth and the high positions - sometimes administrative - that the Christians obtained in the court were resented by the Muslims especially as they themselves became trained and eligible for such positions. Muslim grievances were voiced by a certain Abu Uthman Amr ben Bahr al-Jahiz who in the ninth century complained that the Christians were avoiding the sumptuary laws; that they were riding on horse back, avoiding the payment of Jizyah, hiding the distinctive apparel under other clothes, and in sum behaving as though "the blood of the Catholicus and the Metropolitan and the Bishop was worth as much as the blood of Jafar and Ali and Al-Abas and Hamza" (Vine 1937:104).

The Mongol invasion (1258-1380) reduced the number of Christian communities drastically not because the Mongols were against the Christians, but because their method of warfare left all of Persia in ruins. To make matters worse for the Christians, the Mongols decided to embrace the religion of the conquerors after the last crusaders were defeated by the Muslims. By the time of Timur Lang's invasion (1380) the Christian communities in Persia were reduced to a mere handful and with his advent the

Nestorian remnant in Mesopotamia fled to the shelter of the Kurdistan mountains to join their brethren who had for centuries lived under the shelter of their mountain fastness.

Modern Era: Nineteenth Century

From the end of the fourteenth until the turn of this century the Nestorians occupied a marginal position in the Muslim domain both socially and geographically. We find them in the nineteenth century relegated to a frontier area between Ottoman Turkey and Persia where they lived in villages as farmers and livestock raisers interspersed among a variety of ethnic minorities also marginal to the Islamic socio-political mainstream, such as the Arab, the Armenian, the Azari Turk, and the Kurd.

Western Intervention

The fact that the Assyrians were relegated to a frontier area away from both Persian and Ottoman political centers kept them inconspicuous and relatively safe. Village life and dependence on a subsistence economy added further to their isolation. But that state of affairs terminated with the Western intervention in the Middle East.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century Persia was the scene of rivalry between Russia and England as these two powers, in their political and economic expansion, gradually dissected the Northern and Southern parts of the

country into their respective spheres of influence. The Western military and economic superiority made it virtually impossible for the Persian government to resist such incursions as it was silenced either by threat or bribery. Ottoman Turkey had much the same experience. It witnessed its gradual dismemberment as its European provinces were alienated from it one by one. The embitterment felt against the Western powers was expressed in religious form towards Christians in general, because Christianity was identified with Western imperialism. Consequently foreign agitation was diverted towards the Christian minority at home. The Persian historian Kazemzadeh states:

Several times during serious grievances a general massacre of Christians in Iran was expected. Such was the case with the revolt against the tobacco concession in 1889-90 (Kazemzadeh 1968:288).

In their imperialist endeavors, the Western powers themselves took advantage of the structure of Islamic society and mixed a good deal of politics with religion. Christian "proteges" were often used as an excuse to interfere in the affairs of Muslim governments. Furthermore, both Russian and British delegates took advantage of the influence of Muslim religious leaders among the Muslim populace. There are instances in which the latter were bribed to agitate Muslim public opinion in the direction which served the interests of these rival powers (Kazemzadeh 1968:182,391).

Western Missionaries

The political turmoil in which the Christian minorities in these two Islamic states found themselves was aggravated with the advent of Western missionaries who arrived at the heels of the government and business agents seeking, in their turn, new conquests. To make matters worse for the Assyrians, "Nestorians" were made the focus of missionary attention because the Muslim governments did not permit the missionaries to proselytize among the Muslim populace, but let them have a free hand with the Christian subjects. As the "Nestorians" occupied a strategic position between Arabs, Turks, Kurds, and Persians, they were looked upon as the best intermediary to accomplish the forbidden task, that of converting the Muslims, particularly because the Nestorians had a traditional reputation as successful missionaries in the East. A Presbyterian missionary likened the Nestorians to a "prop upon which to rest the lever that (was to) overturn the whole system of Mohammedan delusion..." (Joseph 1961:44). On the other hand, Western missionaries were looked upon as agents of imperialism by the Muslim populace and therefore their mission was interpreted as political. For this reason they opposed the establishment of close contact between the native Christians and Western missionaries. When American missionaries arrived in Urmiya, an Assyrian Nestorian bishop was "brutally bastinadoed for having invited the

missionaries to his village" (Joseph 1961:48). But the missionaries were there to stay, since the Persian government did not - or perhaps could not - reject them.

Missionary enterprise among the Assyrian Nestorians had several adverse effects:

- A.) Internally, it undermined their religious unity and divided them into competitive sectarian camps.
- B.) Externally it aggravated the already strained relations between the Muslims and the Christian minority and rendered the position of the latter more precarious. Particularly with the Western powers there to protect them, or so they thought, the younger generation of Christians became emboldened to question their economic and political disadvantages, and voice their humiliation for being members of an inferior millet.
- C.) Ideologically it alienated the younger generation of Assyrians from their own traditions and people. Taking a Western point of view, the young scoffed at the traditions of their forefathers as "backward," and imitated the Western way of thought and behavior.

The first two points will be elaborated separately below.

Internal Divisions

The first split in the Nestorian Church occurred in 1553 at which time a faction of the Nestorians deserted the Old Church and became "Uniate." This was accomplished

with the help of Catholic missionaries of the Fransiscan order who had stationed themselves among the Nestorian Assyrians of Mosul district. But the motive behind becoming a Catholic was not so much theological "enlightenment" as it was purely political on the part of the "Uniate Chaldeans," as they came to be referred to. The converts continued their Nestorian traditions and as late as the outbreak of World War I they were reportedly more than willing to rejoin the Old Church if it could only provide them with the same protection that the Catholic Church did (Joseph 1961:33). Nor were they amiss in their judgement: when the War did break out, they were the sole Assyrian community who were spared massacre owing to the influence of their Roman Catholic Patriarch at the Porte (Rockwell 1916:14). Among the Nestorians of Iran, Catholic missionaries were again the first to effect a split in the Church. They were of the Carmelite order and in the seventeenth century succeeded in bringing the entire Nestorian population of the Plain of Sālmās (north of the Plain of Ūrmiyā) into the church of Rome. After these came the American Presbyterian missionaries who stationed themselves in the town of Urmiya in 1834. Subsequently Anglicans, Russian Orthodox, Norwegian Lutherans, Danish Lutherans, Baptists, and more Catholic missionaries arrived in the town of Ūrmiyā. By the end of the nineteenth century the Nestorian Church was chopped up between all these

denominations except the Anglican.³ The result was much bitterness on the part of the leaders of the Nestorian Church who witnessed how fast their congregation was being snatched away from them. The competition between Western missionaries for converts spilled over among the local Christians and before long the Assyrian peasantry was divided into hostile camps molesting one another to their own destruction.⁴ That the Assyrians were turning towards Western denominations was a symptom of their precarious political situation. As they saw it, this was the only way they could get political protection, by trading away their religion.

External Political Effects

The intervention of Great Britain and Russia in the affairs of Persia and Ottoman Turkey was intensified during the nineteenth century as Russia began to expand its territories southward and England became increasingly concerned about the protection of its Asian colony, India. As early as 1828 Russia separated Georgia (north of Azerbāyjān) from Persia in the treaty of Tūrkmān Chāi. Russian rule over the Muslim population of Georgia proved oppressive and this increased the feelings of indignation among the Muslim population. By the time the first Presbyterian missionaries arrived on the scene relations between the Muslim population and the Christian minorities in Persia were tense. Under the circumstances the Assyrian-

Christians came to look upon the missionaries as their sole source of protection. Both Muslim and Christian peasants saw the Western missionaries as all powerful political and religious leaders. But the Assyrians found themselves all the more harassed by their Muslim neighbors after the Western missionaries settled among them. The situation took the form of a vicious circle. The more harassed they were, the more they sought the protection of Christian powers, and by so doing the more they aroused the antagonism of their Muslim hosts. That the British finally intervened and forced the Persian government to ameliorate the condition of the Christian minority in North West Persia, was not so much for the sake of that minority itself, but from fear that Russia might make the case of Christian oppression an excuse to occupy the area, especially because there were rumors that the Nestorians might join the Russian Orthodox Church.

With the intervention of the American and British missionaries, a thirty item law was passed to eliminate some of the common abuses. To mention a few items in the law:

- The testimony of a Christian was to be considered as valid as that of a Muslim in a Persian court.
- Khans and landlords who travelled with a large retinue were not to impose themselves on the hospitality of the villagers but were to pay for

their own provisions.

- A woman who married a Muslim was not to claim all the property of her extended family, but was only entitled to her proper share under the Christian custom (Joseph 1961:90-91).

This last item in the law was designed to prevent the forceful abduction of Christian women with an eye to the property of their kinfolk.

To please the Western powers the Persian government found itself in a most anomalous position. The government officials had to show "deference" towards the Christian minority in the presence of a grudging Muslim populace. For instance in 1890 when the Vali Ahd (the Crown Prince) visited Rezaieh, (Ūrmiyā) he made it a point to give precedence to the Christians in his visits. The following is an account of part of his schedule:

...it was announced that he wished to inspect all the European schools, and to pay return visits on a certain day ... He also went and called on Mār Gauriel, the Bishop of Ardishāi and Ūrmī. This was a great and unprecedented honour, and made the mollahs furious, as he had not called on them individually but had assembled them all in one of the mosques. One of the mushtehids or chief mollahs would not attend and was in consequence stripped of his office and exiled to Kerbelai. The whole of the royal visit was marked by attentions paid to the native Christians and to the foreigners, and this was calculated to have an excellent effect on the behavior of the Mussulmans to the Syrians and Armenians (Maclean & Browne 1892:112-113).

With the mollahs humiliated and the mushtehid (Chief Mollah) banished to Kerbelai, the Vali's visit could only result in more resentment on the part of the Muslim populace towards the native Christians.

The Western missionaries opened schools in which vocational training was also available. They published books in vernacular and classical Syriac. Soon Assyrians were able to publish and read newspapers in their own language. The Assyrian children attended these schools eagerly, and it was this education which later on put them ahead in finding urban type occupations requiring literacy and a knowledge of English or French. But the advancement of the Christian minority was irritating to the Muslim population who were also severely deprived. The situation was aggravated all the more as Assyrians found an avenue for economic mobility by working as migrant laborers or contractors for the Russians. Consequently they surpassed the limitations of their millet status by investing in land, and becoming freehold peasants or town dwelling artisans. History seemed to be repeating itself. The situation in the nineteenth century seemed to be similar to that in the time of the Caliphate when the Christian minority began to acquire, economically speaking, an equal status with the Muslim population in spite of the laws proscribing such equality. An inevitable clash was in the making.

The Fate of Assyrians in Turkish Kurdistan

The expansionist policies of the two imperialist powers - the British and the Russians - in the Ottoman Turkey brought them again in contact with minority groups located in the Eastern border of the Ottoman Turkey. British policy towards the Ottoman government was determined in the nineteenth century by its desire to protect its rich colony - India - from possible threat from Russia. As Russia extended its boundaries into Northern Persia and seemed to have an eye on Eastern Anatolia, the British became seriously concerned. What the British wanted was a strong central government in Turkey which would have a firm control over its Eastern borders to ward off Russian aggression. In this respect British policy coincided with that of the Ottoman Sultans. But Russia desired the opposite: disturbance in the Eastern boundaries and a chance to intervene and expand its power into Eastern Anatolia. To pursue their policies the British, Turkish, and Russian politicians made use of the minorities in the area. These were the Armenians, the Kurds, and the Assyrian highlanders inhabiting the Hakkiari district in Turkish Kurdistan. Russia flared up the feeling of nationalism among the Armenians who began to claim an autonomous Armenian state in Van. The British policy to strengthen the central Ottoman government meant the weakening of the Kurdish and Assyrian tribes whose joint action

had for centuries kept the Ottoman rule short of their mountain fastness. The British finally succeeded in establishing the Ottoman rule in the area by instigating tribe against tribe. The Assyrians were induced by the British to remain loyal to the central government instead of helping the Kurds to combat the Turkish army which was sent to subjugate the Kurds. The Ottoman government in its turn used the Kurds to subdue the Armenian uprising.

A shift in the alliance pattern among the various groups took place which put the Christian minorities (Assyrians and Armenians) on the side of the imperialist powers, and the Kurdish minority on the side of the Ottoman Turkey.

Subsequently life became hard on the Assyrians. In retaliation for their disloyalty towards their former Kurdish allies, Bādr Khān, the Kurdish Khān, waged a religious war against the Assyrian highlanders in 1843 which resulted in heavy losses for the latter. From then on the Assyrians were subject to constant deprecation by both Kurdish Khans and Turkish local officials. The Ottoman central government did not do much to protect the Assyrian minority mainly because it suspected the Assyrian loyalty. This situation led the mountain Assyrians to request Russian protection which complicated the political tensions in the area even further, and increased the suspicion of the Ottoman government towards the Assyrians.

World War I And Consequences

When the War broke out, the Assyrians found themselves in a war zone between Russia representing the allies, and Turkey representing the central powers. In the summer of 1914 the Ottoman officials promised support and safety for Assyrians if they would remain neutral and not join the Russians in War. The mountaineers distrusted the Turks because, as noted above, the government had not protected them formerly, and now, as Turkey was making offers of safe conduct, messengers brought news to the Patriarch of the massacre of Armenians and Assyrians in Rayat villages such as Shamsdin, Nordūz, Ālbāq, Mār Bhīshū, Iyil, and Gāwār (Sūrmā d' Bait Mār Shimūn 1920:77-83). Eventually the mountaineers sided with the Russians and were attacked by joint action on the part of Kurdish and Turkish contingents. As the expected help from Russia did not reach the mountaineers, they ran out of amunitions and the total population fled towards the mountain peaks and remained stranded there. A third of the population died due to lack of shelter and food. The Patriarch, Mar Benyamin Shimun, in consultation with the clan leaders decided to move the entire population towards the Plains of Salmas and Ūrmiyā to join the Russian lines. In the Fall of 1915 35,000 hungry mountaineers were all that could reach the Plains of Salmas and Ūrmiyā out of an estimated total of 91,800 individuals (Rockwell 1916:68).

As to Iran, the government declared the country a neutral power; but it was too weak to maintain the country's neutrality. Even before war was officially declared, Turkish and Kurdish forces attacked the villages surrounding the town of Ūrmiyā. A number of villages (Muslim and Christian) were looted and their surviving inhabitants fled to the town. The government was unable to protect its borders, and the Russians, who had in fact occupied Azerbaijan, forced the enemy to retreat. Eventually not only the Christian minorities such as Assyrians and Armenians, but also the tribal elements all over the country such as Persian Kurds and Bakhtiaris, the Qashqais, the Baluchis, the Hazaras and the Khamsahs, independently sided with either the Allies or Central Powers depending on the advantages the situation offered them.⁵ The Assyrian mountaineers of Turkey and the Persian Assyrian peasants of Ūrmiyā were formally recruited as a part of the Allied army in 1916. Under their own leaders, Agha Petros, and Mar Benyamin Shimun they rendered invaluable service in guarding the Azerbaijan line.

In the summer of 1918 the native Christian irregulars were the sole force left to protect Sālmās (a district north of Ūrmiyā) and Ūrmiyā from the Turkish attack. But even this force was broken down when a British despatch called a contingent out to collect ammunition from the British in a

small town south of Ūrmiyá. Āghā Petros and his men did not deem it prudent to leave the Christian population unprotected; but Lady Surma the sister of the Patriarch, who was educated in England and was loyal to the British, urged the men to take the British advice. (after the murder of the Patriarch Mār Ben Yāmin Shimūn she was the de facto leader of the nation). With the main body of the fighting men gone, the Christians who were surrounded by the hostile Muslim population, became concerned and then positively alarmed when rumors spread that Agha Petros and all his men were murdered (Joseph 1961:144). Panic stricken, the Christian population evacuated Ūrmiyá and Sālmās and fled southward to join the British. Those who could make it, reached the outskirts of the town of Hamadan and found themselves under the supervision of a small British force. A portion of these refugees later escaped from the British control and entered the town of Hamadan. (The British had barred the entrance to the town and prevented movement in or out of it). The refugees who thus escaped were succored by the American mission relief work.⁶ The rest who remained under the British control were organized as follows: a few battalions of Assyrian able bodied men were set up and drilled for military missions. Women were put to break stones and sew sacks for the British road construction projects. The Assyrians were given the impression that this was a preparation for their

return home. Instead they were all taken to a refugee camp in Baquba near Baghdad. Here again the men continued to be drilled for military mission even though the war was over. They were still told that this was necessary for their homebound return. Instead the Assyrian men were recruited as mercenaries to guard British interests in Iraq, their newly acquired mandate. These interests were partly the oil rich reserves of Mosul district. According to the Assyrians who witnessed the War events and later came to occupy sensitive positions in the levies, the evacuation of the Assyrians, their transfer to Iraq, and subsequent employment in the levies were all pre-planned and staged by the British (Malik 1935:191; Daniel 1969:32). (See Appendix B for an excerpt from an article written by the British officer who headed the British Military Mission to the Assyrians during the Great War).

Plans For The Resettlement Of The Assyrians

According to the recommendations of Mosul Committee which was appointed by the League of Nations to look into the problem of the uprooted Assyrians, they were to be settled en bloc in the district of Mosul under the leadership of their Patriarch, and were to enjoy the local autonomy they had had under the Ottoman rule. This was one of the conditions for awarding the Mosul district to Iraq instead of Turkey. It was also because of it that the Assyrians voted on the side of Iraq when the plebiscite

for the vilayet of Mosul was taken. But the League of Nations proved to be only a puppet organization in the hands of big Powers. The British intrigues prevented the settlement of Assyrians in the Plain of Mosul as recommended by the Mosul commission. By 1928 the plan for an autonomous existence or a homogenous (bloc) resettlement of Assyrians in Mosul was completely abandoned. But the mandatory government never informed the Assyrian leaders of this, so as not to antagonize them. On the contrary the British government representatives in Iraq kept Assyrian hopes up. It was only in 1932 that the Iraqi officials informed the Assyrian leaders that the recommendations of Mosul Committee had been abandoned.⁷ By then the British were already pulling out of Iraq. Alternative schemes for the resettlement of Assyrian refugees were also abandoned because they were considered either "unfeasible" or "too expensive." In 1919 the British had suggested to the Assyrians to resettle in Canada. But the Assyrians had shown preference to return to their former homes. As an elderly Assyrian woman put it, "We did not want to go to Canada because we feared the British would make us their "servants"."

Final Dispersion and Resettlement

In 1937 all plans for the resettlement of Assyrians were definitely abandoned. With the refugee camps closed, the Assyrians dispersed among the different countries of

Syria, Iran, and Iraq and started an uneasy coexistence in nations against whom they had fought in the War. The Hakkiari Assyrians were distributed in 73 villages in Northern Iraq where they lived as sharecroppers in either government or privately owned villages. Some Hakkiari Assyrians fled to Syria as refugees from Iraq and settled along the Khabour river. This settlement was expanded and declared permanent by the League Council in 1941. All the Assyrians of Iran who had survived the War, except two thousand who remained in Iraq, and about a thousand who migrated to North America and Europe, returned to Urmiya in 1922. The two thousand who remained in Iraq lived in the major cities as did the other Assyrians who had immigrated previously to urban centers from the villages in the Plain of Mosul. The urbanized Assyrians of Iraq were not affected greatly by the turmoil which involved the Hakkiari Assyrians in Northern Iraq.

The world distribution of Assyrians in the early 1940's was estimated as follows: Russia, 55,000; Iraq, 35,000; Iran, 25,000; Syria, 13,000; United States, 11,600; Greece, 1500; total, 141,100 (Beynon 1944:266).

To conclude: In their imperialist expansion during the nineteenth century, Great Britain and Russia took advantage of the dissatisfaction of the marginal groups with their lot as inferior subjects of the Ottoman and Persian states, and used them to weaken and ultimately

breakdown the political and economic structure of these two Islamic states. This was accomplished, on the ideological level, by flaring up the feeling of nationalism in these groups. The imperialist Powers presented themselves as the protectors of the rights of the native Christians and installed the hope of national self determination in these minority groups. With the European Powers there to back them, the leaders of the Christian minorities such as the Assyrians and the Armenians took the bid for autonomy and fought on the side of the allies during World War I, to defeat their former masters. After the war the Assyrians were used to maintain the British hegemony in Iraq. Moreover, the issue of the Assyrian rights to their homeland was successfully exploited by the British government representatives to obtain the oil rich district of Mosul for Iraq. But once the European Powers had fulfilled their ambitions in the Middle East, the cause of minorities and their national aspirations were dismissed. Consequently not only these minorities (Kurds, Assyrians, and Armenians) did not fulfill their dreams for national self determination, but the Assyrians and the Armenians were also uprooted from their former homes. Moreover, with the destruction of the millets, their political and economic basis of social organization was destroyed.

We will now turn to the Assyrian traditional mode of life which was thus undermined.

NOTES

- ¹The Assyrian Nestorians have never officially referred to themselves as "Nestorians." The title by which they describe themselves is "Church of the East." The "Nestorian" name was applied to them by the Christian orthodoxy to stigmatize them as "heretics."
- ²At the time the Schism between Eastern Churches and the Roman Church had not become finalized yet.
- ³The policy of the Anglican missions was not to convert, but preserve the Church as it was.
- ⁴For a more detailed account of the missionary enterprise and competition among the Nestorians see J. Joseph 1961: 55,66,80-83; and H. Curzon 1:(2nd Ed.) 1966:246.
- ⁵For a full account of the political state of Iran during the war see Ramazani 1966.
- ⁶This piece of information was kindly provided by Mr. W. Daniel whose family was among those who were able to re-enter the town of Hamadan.
- ⁷For a well documented and comprehensive treatment of the subject see Joseph 1961:Chapter VIII; and Johnson 1938: 338-379.

CHAPTER IV

TRADITIONAL MODE OF LIFE: PASTORAL ADAPTATION

Socio-political Organization

The organization of the Assyrian community was based on the principle of patrilineal descent. Three types of social organization, the ashiret, the rayat, and the peasant will be defined and discussed below.

Ashiret. The principle of the patrilineal descent was best exemplified in the organization of the Assyrian highlanders inhabiting the Kurdish mountains bordering Turkey and Persia in the nineteenth century. The highlanders were composed of a hard core - confederacy - of eight warrior clans called collectively the "āshiret" (the autonomous clans). They held blocs of mountain territory in the Hakkari highlands as private and communal property. The clans were localized and corporate units. Membership in the clan was patrilineally inherited. Political and religious power was concentrated in the position of a hereditary Patriarch called generally "Mār Shimūn." The Mār Shimūns were from a noble family or lineage. Although nominally under the Ottoman rule, the Patriarch had in fact, in a quasi feudal type of relationship, the overlordship of all the Kurdish and Assyrian clans residing in the sanjāk (district) of Hākkīāri. This was a tributary

principality which because of its inaccessible location, was beyond the Sultan's control. The "Ashiret" (confederacy of autonomous clans) was composed of eight "shodi" (clans). These were Upper Tyāri, Lower Tyāri, Tkhūmā, Tāl, Bāz, Jilū, Zārān Zir, and Dazin. The "shodā" (clan in singular) was the primary landowning and political group. Each clan had its own territory which was called after its own name, and comprised of a number of villages. Each clan had a share in the communal grazing pasture. It had its own winter grounds, hunting grounds, woodland, and farmland. The farmland was privately owned. Every clan had its own burial grounds where all the clan members were to be buried. Every member of the clan knew the location of the grave of the clan ancestor. That grave was considered sacred (Eibla 1914:21).

Politically the clan was autonomous. It had its own judge, war chief, "mālik" (clan chief), priests and congregation. Thus the clans had a segmentary structure, that is, they were not hierarchically organized vis a vis each other.

Each clan was divided into "oujāgheh" (lineages). Thus the Upper Tyāri clan had five "oujāgheh:" Bānīmātā, Lākīnā, Rountā, Gālletā, and Biyāltā. Each "oujāgh" (lineage in singular) had traditional rights over a section of clan territory. Its internal affairs were regulated by a council of village elders under the supervision of the

"kokhá" (village headman).

On the Persian side of the border, in the uplands of Tergávár, Mergávár, and Brádost which lie in a north-southerly direction parallel to the frontier line, lived the Assyrian pastoralists of Persia. These clans were virtually independent thanks to the hilly country they inhabited, and lived much as the ^váshiret clans did in Turkey.

Ráyát. In the more accessible hill country north and south of ashiret territory, and in the upland plains just west of the Persian border, lived the following semi-ashiret* and ráyát (serf) clans: Berwár, Álbág, Drenāye, Shemsdīnān, Gárdīyan, Zārūwān, Gerāmūn-Hálāmūn, Sūpnā Ámādiā, and Gávár. The Plain of Gávár was situated on the Turco-Persian border next to the uplands of Tergávár and Mergávár. Gávár was vulnerable to attack because of its treeless landscape. Since its fertile soil produced excellent wheat, the Turkish Āghās had subjugated it as a prize booty. The missionary Coan states that in 1851 there were twenty Assyrian villages, one Armenian, and a few Kurdish villages in Gávár (Coan 1939:12).

The "ráyát" clans were organized socially like the

*Dr. Beynon (1944:262) uses the term semi-ashiret without defining it. I have not yet been able to find out what was the difference between the semi-ashiret and rayat clans.

ashiret clans. Except that after being subjugated by Kurdish clans, their surplus products and political alliance was diverted to their Kurdish overlords. Thus during inter-clan feuds, political alliance was not based on religion or ethnic differences. It was a matter of power politics. This same situation held true in the case of Kurdish clans which had become "rāyāt" to the Assyrian autonomous clans.

Peasants. Besides the Assyrian "āshīret" and "rāyāt" clans, there were the Assyrian peasants who occupied the Plain of Mosul situated in Turkish domain; and the plateau of Sālmās, Ūrmiyā, and Sūldūz located in North West Persia. These were mainly sharecroppers to either Ottoman Turks on the Turkish side of the border or to Āzārī Turks on the Persian side. We shall examine the peasant adaptation in more detail shortly.

As the lord of Hākkiāri, Mār Shimūn (the Patriarch) ruled his people and his Kurdish subjects through his personal authority rather than the political power invested in the office he occupied (For examining the difference see Barth 1953:50-52). The Patriarch not only consecrated Metropolitans and Bishops for all the Nestorian dioceses in Turkey and elsewhere, but also confirmed or rejected the Assyrian and Kurdish "maliks" (clan chiefs) who were chosen from hereditary chiefly families in the Hakkari district. The Patriarchal house was a large redistributive

center. It was a perpetual "guest house;" a center of diplomatic negotiations between clans, and a courthouse where justice was administered by the Patriarch.

Beyond the Hakkiari district Mār Shimūn had partial power as a religious head over the Assyrian serf clans as well as the Assyrian peasantry in Ottoman Turkey or Persia.

The link between the Assyrian Nestorians was not only linguistic and religious, but also political. Even though the Assyrian "rāyāts" had fallen out of his temporal jurisdiction, they were in effect still under the Patriarch's political protection. The Patriarch was responsible and concerned about the safety of all his people, and the Assyrians of the Plain of Ūrmiyā for instance, did not hesitate to call on their mountaineer brethren for protection in time of Turkish or Kurdish disturbances, and usually got the protection they needed. In fact during World War I it was the presence of these mountaineer warriors who most probably saved the Assyrians of the Plain of Ūrmiyā and Sālmās from total destruction.

Ecology: Pastoral Adaptation

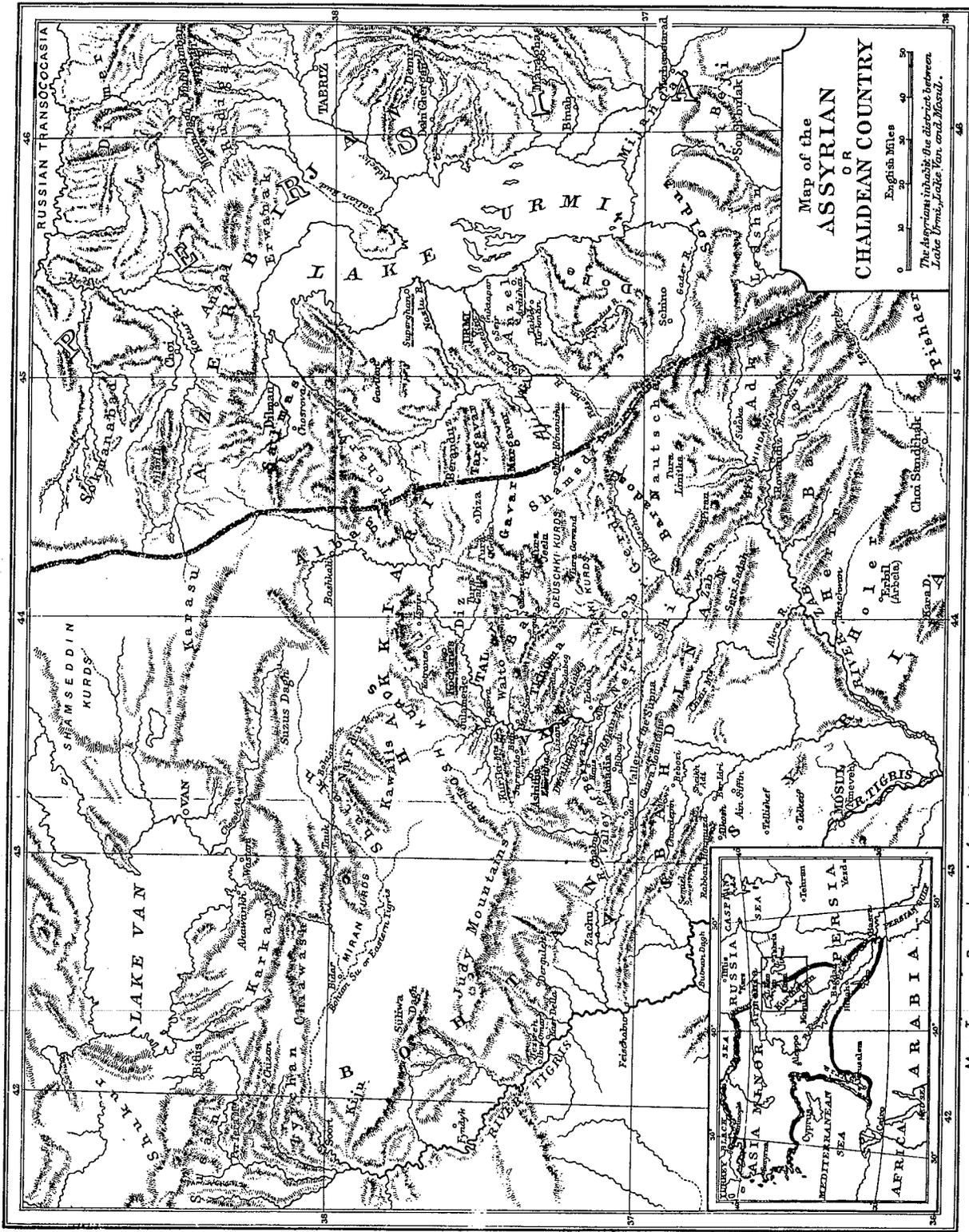
The Assyrians were divided into semi-sedentary pastoralists and sedentary peasants. The first group inhabited the valley of the river of the "Great Zāb" in Hakkiari. The Assyrian highlanders engaged partly in agriculture and partly in raising sheep and goats. They cultivated rice, tobacco, and cereal crops on both sides

of the valley of the Záb. Much ingenuity and labor was employed to make the utmost use of scarce land and to conduct the water up hill for irrigation. Soil was carried on men's backs to the sides of rocky canyons and was spread in terrace fashion to extend the cultivable land. Orchards of apples, pomegranates, figs, and walnuts were also raised. In summer the clans moved from the valleys to their "zamani" grounds (summer pastures) where large amounts of cheese, clarified butter, and other dairy products were produced and sent down to the village for barter or storage. To make the utmost use of land the villages, particularly in Tyari, were built in terrace fashion against a slope with the roof of one serving as a yard for the house above it. The economy was a householding economy. The emphasis was to satisfy subsistence needs. The unit of production and consumption was the extended family household. Under the leadership of the male and female elders, the members performed the various tasks assigned to them. The eldest male in the family (father or eldest brother) held final authority in matters concerning the household.

There was some local variation in production and specialization in village crafts. The villagers in Shamsdinan were reputed for growing good tobacco; Gáwár, Līwān, and Ālbāg were cereal producers. They grew wheat, barley and vegetables. The Assyrians of Báz were builders and blacksmiths; in winter they migrated to Mosul to work

at their trade. Tyāri men were well known for weaving and knitting. The Assyrians of Mosul and Amadia specialized in gold and silver work; they were also merchants. The Assyrians of Ūrmiyā were vineyard growers. They produced raisins and wine (Surma 1920:56-57).

The division between pastoral and peasant adaptation was reflected in the Assyrian social structure. The peasants of the plains referred to their pastoral brethren by the name of "shābidnāy," a rather derogatory term meaning "a rough, crude mountaineer." The pastoralist was not only distinct in his mode of life, but also in his style of clothing and way of speech, a Syriac dialect slightly different from that spoken by the plains people. Local solidarity and preference for endogamy kept the peasants and pastoralists in socially isolated enclaves. However, the constant flow of highlanders from the overpopulated mountain valleys to the plains bridged the gap between the two to some extent. There were also the traditional shrines located in the home of the highlanders, and the common rituals, which brought the two groups together. More research is needed to find out about the extent and type of economic exchange between the peasants and pastoralists.



Map I
Reproduced from Maclean and Browne 1892

CHAPTER V

TRADITIONAL MODE OF LIFE: PEASANT ADAPTATION

(ASSYRIANS OF URMIYA)

Historical Background

Until the outbreak of World War I the Assyrians of Iran were localized in Northwestern Iran. They trace their origins to the Assyrians who were settled in the region during Sargonide times, when Assyrians invaded the Median territory. P. Sarmas a contemporary Assyrian writer quoting Z. Rogzobin refers to a clay tablet from Sargon II(722-705 B.C.) in which the latter explicitly states that he subdued a Median uprising in the area which is now Persian Kurdistan and resettled it with Assyrian colonies (Sarmas 1965:50-51). The town of Ūrmiyǎ which is now called Rezaieh after the name of the present Shah's father, seems to be of considerable antiquity. The name "Ūrmēáte" is mentioned on the Assyrian clay tablets. Syriac writers state that "Ūrmiyǎ" is a Syriac name meaning "cradle of water" (Ūri-d-Miyǎ). In 1888 a cylindrical seal carved with the figures of Babylonian gods was found in a vaulted chamber at a depth of twenty five feet in the Christian Assyrian village of Gogtapa near the town of Ūrmiyǎ (Minorsky 1934:1032). Numerous other objects of considerable antiquity have been found in several tells

in the vicinity of villages near the town of Ūrmiyā. Whatever the ancient origins of Assyrians in Ūrmiyā, that much is certain: the Assyrian population there was regularly replenished by the inflow of Assyrian highlanders from the surrounding hills.

From the dialetrical variation which is prevalent among the Assyrian villages in Ūrmiyā, it is believed that part of the Assyrian population came from Mārāgā, Oushnū, and Tābriz. These districts are located north and south of the Plain of Ūrmiyā. Although at present few Assyrians live in these areas, historically they have had a considerable Assyrian population (Nikitine 1925:358).

According to the traditions of the Assyrians of Iran, it was St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, who introduced them to Christianity. To this day the Assyrians of Ūrmiyā go on pilgrimage to bathe in the Lake of Ūrmiyā on July the third which is St. Thomas day; as they believe that the apostle crossed the Lake on his way to India (Maclean & Browne 1892:79).

As the district of Ūrmiyā was largely populated by Kurds and Christians, it did not constitute a politically significant province during the Islamic era. It remained an isolated fief in the hands of "khans" (chiefs) appointed by the different dynasties that ruled in the province of Azerbaijan. However, as a frontier region, it had a turbulent history. It frequently changed hands

between rival Turkish and Kurdish "khans." During the sixteenth century it was a major battle ground between the Safavids of Iran (Shiite Muslims) and Ottoman Sultans (Sunni Muslims). To stabilize the political situation, Shah Abas the Great (the Safavid king) populated the plateau by Afshar Turks (Shiite Muslims) in the sixteenth century. The Afshar Turks were endowed with a measure of autonomy under their Beglar-Bey to assure the protection of the region from Kurds and the Sunni Turks of the Ottoman Turkey.* But political turmoil continued as the Afshars battled with rival Turkic dynasties such as the Afghans and the Qadjars who gained political supremacy in Iran successively. In the nineteenth century the Qadjars and the Afshars settled their differences by effecting a political marriage between Fath Ali Shah, the Qadjar king of Persia, and the sister of Hussain Kuli Khan Afshar. The sons from this marriage became the governors of Ūrmiyā.

Demography

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the population of the town of Ūrmiyā was estimated at six to seven

*The Afshar Turks are popularly known as Azari Turks since they speak a Turkish dialect known as "Azari." They have little racial affinity with the inhabitants of Turkey across the border. Some are in fact of Iranian stock and have acquired Azari since it has been the vernacular of the region.

thousand households of which a hundred were Christians, three hundred Jewish, and the remainder Shiite Muslims. Another estimate puts the total population of the province of Azerbaijan in the year 1900 at 300,000, 45% of whom were Christians. Among the Christian population the total Assyrian population (different denominations combined) was 76,000; the Armenians numbered 50,000 and the Jews 1000 (Mirosky 1934:1035).

Topography and Ethnogeography

The plateau (popularly called the plain) of Ūrmiyā is an area eighty miles long from north to south and thirty five miles wide from east to west. It is situated at an altitude between four to five thousand feet above sea level. It is the largest and the most fertile in a series of plains which lie in a north - south direction. These plains are separated from one another by transversal mountain ranges that cut across them. The Plain of Ūrmiyā is in the middle of the line of other plains. To the north of it is found the little plain of Gāvīlān which is not as well watered as Ūrmiyā and has an undulating relief, as it lies at the foot of the transversal range called Awghan Dāghi (dāgh means "mountain" in Azari Turkish). Here the peasant and pastoral subcultures coexist side by side. The village of Gāvīlān was inhabited entirely by Assyrians in the nineteenth century. To the north of the plain of Gāvīlān is the plain of Sālmās.

It is smaller than the plain of Ūrmiyǎ and is watered by a small stream. In 1885 its Christian population was comprised of twenty Armenian and three Assyrian (Uniate Chaldeans) villages. The Muslim villages in Sǎlmǎs outnumbered those of the Christians. The villages inhabited by the Assyrians of Sǎlmǎs were owned by Muslim religious Sheikhs (Coan 1939:46). The pastoral adaptation prevailed over the peasant, and the Assyrians of Sǎlmǎs were called "Shābidnāy" by the "Ūrmijnāy" (the Assyrians of Urmiya). They spoke the mountain Syriac dialect.

The plain of Ūrmiyǎ is bound in the south by the plain of Sūldūz. In the nineteenth century Sūldūz had a substantial Assyrian population about whom not much is written. The area, ethnically speaking, is considered "Kurdish," since the majority of the population consists of sedentary Kurds.

The series of plains mentioned above are bounded in the East by the Lake of Ūrmiyǎ, a shallow sheet of water with a high degree of salinity, and in the West by the hilly uplands of Tergāvār; Mergāvār and Brādost, which was the home of the Assyrian Persian pastoralists. All these plains and hilly uplands were and still are part of the province of Western Azerbaijan, the administrative center of which was and is the town of Ūrmiyǎ.

The plain of Ūrmiyǎ is watered by the three rivers of Bārāndūz Chāī (chāī means 'river' in Āzārī Turkish),

Ājī Chāī, and Nāzlū Chāī, all of which have their source in the hills to the west, and flow eastward towards and into the Lake of Ūrmiyā. The abundant water supply renders the plain of Ūrmiyā extremely fertile. The alluvial soil is deeper and richer due to recent phases of volcanicity. The villages are buried among orchards and vineyards. The whole plain looks like a huge garden in summer time. The surrounding plains and hilly uplands on the other hand, are less suitable for cultivation due to relief and moderate deficit of water; instead natural conditions make them ideal for the breeding of sheep and goats.

Climate, Seasons, Roads¹

Western Azarbayjan constitutes a zone of cooler temperatures compared to the rest of the country. During the winter the entire plateau is invaded by cold air masses from the North. The temperature drops often below zero Fahrenheit (-18 C). As the frosts are severe, the cattle are kept indoors. Some Western missionaries have likened the weather to that of Canada. Spring breakup is in March. The two months of March and April are very pleasant, but summer months are relatively hot and drive people to the rooftops to sleep in the fresh air. The mean annual rainfall in Ūrmiyā is 370 mm, which is adequate for successful farming. The province of Āzerbyjān ranks as one of the most densely populated areas

of the country, and it is certainly one of the most agriculturally productive.

In the nineteenth century the villages in the plain of Ūrmiyā were connected with each other and with the town by a network of dirt roads or tracks which even during winter were kept open and considerable and continuous communication took place by way of them. The mode of locomotion in town and the outskirts was by donkey or horse. For long distances in addition to horses, mules and even camels were used.

Village: Physical Aspect

The villages of Ūrmiyā stretch along the three rivers of Bārāndūz, Ājī, and Nāzlū Chāī. The villages are compact structures and are situated at short distances from one another; the Christian villages interspersed among the Turkish. Before World War I from a total of three hundred and some villages, sixty were inhabited by Assyrians exclusively. The rest had a mixed population or were inhabited by Āfshār Turks (Nikitine 1925:357). The villages look very much alike. The dwellings are situated close to one another (often, in fact, attached) in a row on both sides of the village lanes. The orchards, vegetable gardens, vineyards, ploughed fields, and the threshing floor surround the village. The village is situated close to an "Āynā," the spring where underground water makes its appearance on the surface. Here come

women with their "tálmá" (earthen jars) on their shoulders to fetch water for drinking and cooking. The spring is a public meeting place for women who also bring clothes and pots to be washed in the spring. Water buffalos are bathed in the pool which is constructed just below the spring.

Village House

In the nineteenth century village dwellings were built of mud, the better ones with sundried bricks. Every dwelling had a small courtyard. Its walls separated one dwelling from another. At one end of the courtyard close to the entrance was the stable. At the other end was the granary and the "betá," meaning literally, "the house." This was the room where the family lived.² "Betá" was always on the ground floor. It had no windows and the main outlet, beside the door was in the roof. In the floor, near the wall was found the "tanūrā." This was a circular oven dug two or three feet deep and cased with clay. It was used for baking the oval shaped, paper thin, large sheets of bread called "lāvāshā." Meals were cooked on top of the "tānūra" in large earthen cauldrons. Tanuyra also served the purpose of heating the room. When cooking was over, and its heat had subsided, a quilt or blanket was spread over the top and the family sat around the tānūrā with their feet hanging down. The beta was where the family ate, slept in

winter time, and where women did their spinning and the elders discussed issues of importance in the village. At night bed clothes were spread out on the floor and youngsters might share the same mattress. In day time the bedclothes were folded one on top of the other in the center of a large square sheet of cloth. Then the ends of the sheet were brought together and tied into a knot. The bundle then was stacked against the wall to serve as a cushion for family members to lean against when sitting. Two of these huge cushions could cover more than half of a wall. A mat was placed at the foot of these "cushions" to make the sitting place more comfortable. At meal time a table cloth was spread on the floor and the family gathered around it to eat. The diet consisted of "gǎlyǎ" (precooked meat), cracked wheat, lentils, vegetables, dairy products, herbs, and fruits. Rice and fresh meat were festive items.³ Bread was the staple food. To have lunch or dinner in Assyrian is literally called "to eat bread." Lunch was the main meal of the day; breakfast and supper were light. During summer months people slept on the rooftops. A wooden ladder served the purpose of a staircase. As the dwellings were close to one another, people visited one another on the roof top.

Economy and Technology

Tools. The tools used in cultivating land were the

traditional "kootán" (the primitive plough); scythes or sickles; and "járjár" (threshing machine). In addition human and animal (that of oxen and buffalos) labor formed the total means of energy employed in cultivating land. Watermills were used to grind wheat into flour. "Kootán" was an iron-shod wooden plough. This type of plough only scratches the ground, and to render it more efficient for the hard Ūrmiyá soil, usually four to six or even eight oxen were used. The operation involved several peasants, each with a pair of oxen working as a team. In this case a very large plough and plough share could be utilized. One man drove each team. An additional person guided the plough. The "járjár" or threshing machine consisted of a roller about five feet long and one and a half feet high with teeth or flint stone, or iron spikes spirally arranged on it. Above the roller was a seat for the driver. At harvest time the wheat was cut by means of sickles or scythes and tied into sheaves. These were then hauled to the threshing floor and spread in a circle. The thresher was attached to a team of oxen driven in circles over the sheaves that had been previously opened and spread. As the thresher was drawn, the roller turned and chopped the wheat blades. Winnowing was done by means of a pitchfork. The grain was thrown into the air, and with the help of the wind the chaff was blown away while the kernels fell to the

ground. The chaff was stored for fodder and plastering.

Methods of Cultivation

Cultivation methods conformed to the traditional Middle Eastern pattern. In spring time when the snow melted, the agricultural cycle began. First the ground was ploughed. Animal manure was used to fertilize it. Then narrow ditches were drawn to divide the field for irrigation. Certain plots were left fallow once every three years. Crop rotation was practiced too. Water from the river was led into a network of artificial watercourses which were carried into the fields for proper irrigation. Water was and still is most vital for agriculture in the area and water rights were jealously guarded. Most strife among villagers arose because of one neighbor stealing the water of another by diverting water into his own fields. Water was allocated to different fields by the Turkish "mīrāb-bāshī" (water chief). After irrigation it was time for seeding the ground. Seed was sown by hand, broadcast. At harvest time the sheaves of wheat were hauled to the threshing floor by means of a "gārdoon" a large wagon about fifteen feet long. The bed was six feet wide at one end and gradually narrowed until it reached to a point where it was less than a foot wide. It stood on two large wooden wheels located near the wider end. It was pulled by a team of oxen or buffalos who were attached to the narrow

end of the "gārdoon." When it was not used, the "gārdoon" lay on the village lane and served as a huge teeter-totter for the children who tipped it first this way then that as a crowd of them ran from one end to the other. The threshing floor was a plot of land about twenty five square feet which was levelled off and hardened by plaster. A pole was raised in the middle of the threshing floor and to it the oxen were fastened so they could only walk in a circle around it pulling the jārjār in time of threshing. After winnowing, markers were put on the pile of wheat kernels by "āghā's" agent so that the harvest would not be touched until the āghā's (landlord's) share was removed from the pile. The greeting etiquette changed according to the agricultural cycle. In fact almost every occasion in life called for a special pattern of greeting. For instance the common greeting before harvest time when a person came across peasants working the land was "May God give you strength" to which the answer was "Welcome, may God keep your children." During the harvest the greeting changed into "Let God increase it" to which the answer was, "Welcome, may God give you long life."

Vineyards

After the grain fields, the vineyards were the Ūrmiyā peasant's greatest asset and his source of cash. The vines lay on ridges about thirty feet long, five

wide, and four high, called "bǎwǎti." This structure exposed the grapes to the hot rays of sun and kept them dry during irrigation. The size of a vineyard was measured by the number of ridges or "bǎwǎti" it contained. A vineyard of forty bǎwǎti was considered small, and only sufficient to satisfy the subsistence needs of an extended family. Several uses were made of grapes. The white varieties were usually eaten fresh. The red ones with a hard skin preserved well. They ripened late too. These were picked last and tied with reeds; then they were hung by nails to the ceiling of the "zǎr zǎmǐ" (the storage room). In this form they were called "tlūi" and were kept all winter long and eaten as desert or a snack. Molasses, wine, vinegar, and "ǎrǎg," a strong alcoholic beverage, were also made from grapes. Raisins and "sǎvzǎ" (sultana raisins) were made for home use and sale. Making "sǎvzǎ" was a complicated affair and involved several people. Before laying the grapes to dry, they had to be immersed in a hot solution of water to which the ashes of the strong smelling thornbush were added. To make "kishmēshi" (raisins) grapes were simply spread to dry in the sun. The drying area was called "vǎrǎžǎn." This was a fifteen to twenty degrees incline or slope, about twenty or thirty feet wide. Its length was relative to the extent of vineyards owned, for on it the raisins and sǎvzǎ were spread to receive the rays of the sun at a

favorable angle. The length varied from fifty to a hundred and fifty feet and even more. Besides the vārāzān other constructions in the vineyard were the winepress, and the big fireplace for cooking molasses. This looked very much like a "tanūra" constructed above the ground. There was also the "kolā" a small mud building where the family could live at harvest time. Town folk who had a vineyard in the village built a more substantial "kolā" where they spent all the summer months.

Beside the grain fields, the vineyard, and the livestock - mainly cattle and water buffalos - the peasant also tended his orchard, and vegetable and melon garden. The orchards included apple, peach, apricot, and mulberry trees. In hilly areas almond and walnut orchards were more common.

Ownership Of Land And Property.

Almost all of the Assyrian Christians of Ūrmiyā lived in villages of Ūrmiyā as sharecroppers. The landlords or "āghās" were mainly Āfshār Turks. There were a few Christian peasants who owned their own grain fields, and one or two who owned half or even one whole village. This was a late nineteenth century development. It was made possible from savings made by men who worked as migrant laborers in Russia or overseas in North America. The landlord had complete authority over his "subjects" as the government officials would not interfere in the

affairs of the "āghās." Both Christian and Muslim peasants suffered from the oppression exerted by the landlords which were reported to be continuous. Oppression occurred when extra taxes were levied, or men were forced to work for nothing, and women abducted. The taxes paid by the peasants were both in cash and in kind. The peasant gave two thirds of the cereal produce to his "āghā" if the latter provided the seed; otherwise "āghā's" share was one third of the produce.⁴ The peasant paid a ground tax on his house, the vineyard, the orchard, and grass field. If the house was built by the peasant himself, then he could sublet or sell it. But if the house belonged to the āghā, the latter could evict the peasant at will. If the peasant had raised his vineyard or the orchard "from scratch" he could sell or sublet it. Most of the Assyrian villagers "owned" their vineyards and orchards in this sense. But if these were already developed when the peasant got them, then a definite share of the produce went to the "āghā." Livestock such as buffalos, cows, goats and fowls were taxed too. Moreover each house gave the āghā a "fee on the occasion of marriage" a load of manure fuel, some eggs, and "two fowls" (Maclean & Browne 1892:122-123). Furthermore every Christian male over sixteen years of age (excepting the priesthood) paid a poll tax in lieu of military service, and every house paid the sarparast, "the Muslim governor

of the Christians" an annual tax plus a small present of firewood.

The method of taxation was called "gyūr-āl" meaning "see and take." Due to the excesses of the landlords, the peasants had developed the system of restricted consumption and minimum production in order to have as little to "show" as possible. According to the Anglican missionaries, Maclean and Browne, the taxes if justly administered were not excessive. But as cash was unavailable due to subsistence orientation of the peasants, and the cheap price of produce, the Persian peasant was much more burdened by taxes he had to pay than his European counterpart (1892:123).

Land and livestock, especially water buffalos, were the most prized property items. The buffalo was the major plough and draft animal. It also gave abundant milk from which a white, creamy butter could be produced. Every peasant household needed at least a team of buffalos or oxen to be able to cultivate the land. Livestock was raised solely for subsistence, for its products and work and not for sale in the market. Cattle were not slaughtered for their meat unless very old or barren.

Household Economy

The village economy was typically a peasant householding economy. It was geared to subsistence rather than production for the market. Between a man and a

woman, the latter was a better provider as she, with her food preserving techniques, rendered the household practically self-sufficient, and well provided during the winter months. She dried all sorts of vegetables, fruits, and herbs for winter use. A whole sheep was bought in the summer. It was slaughtered and the meat was cut into bite size chunks; then it was cooked thoroughly. In this form the cooked meat was called "gǎlyǎ." "Gǎlyǎ" was put in earthen jars, covered with clarified butter, and stored away to be used throughout the year. Every part of the sheep was utilized: the women made soap with its fat, and spun the wool into yarn and knit socks for the whole family. Clarified butter and cheese were made in large quantities. Cheese was grated, then to it were added herbs and spices. It was then packed into earthen jars and buried underground so that it would turn sharp and more flavory. Large quantities of flour, sugar, lentils, and bread were stacked away in the storage room, the "zǎr zǎmi." The only items that had to be purchased were sugar, tea, wheat, kerosene, and agricultural tools.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century it became common for men to go to Tiflis (Russia) and work there as migrant laborers during the winter months. This provided the peasants with an extra source of cash and enabled some to buy land and become freehold peasants. Others learned different trades through apprenticeship

in Tiflis, and on their return moved to town where they formed a class of affluent artisans and craftsmen. Some of the trades that Assyrians specialized in were brick-laying, carpentry, tailoring, shoemaking, and painting.

Exchange

Some exchange between villagers and the peddlers who frequented the village took place by barter, but cash was needed to go to the town "bāzār" (market) in Ūrmiyā. This was a "sectional market." It was not only a regional distributive center, but also a manufacturing area. The carpenter, the blacksmith, the candy man, all manufactured their products at the same time that they haggled over the price of finished items. It was here that the peasant brought his "sāvzā" (sultana raisins) or a small stack of firewood to sell to the town merchant for cash. He then purchased the necessary items to supplement his livelihood beyond his own subsistence production. The main exchange among peasant households however, took place within the village and through the process of delayed and unbalanced reciprocity. Labor, tools, and food were exchanged freely among the households of a village. But any item of food if borrowed in small quantities, such as a bowl of rice, or sugar was not immediately returned. Other items or tools if also borrowed in small quantities, such as firewood or wool or a harness were not returned immediately either. Immediate and balanced reciprocity was considered too

exacting and improper except between strangers. But a person who had given a bowl of rice to his neighbor one day, could ask for something he needed another day, and would not be refused. Tools and utensils if borrowed, were to be returned to their owner. However, if one loaned a tool to a neighbor, it would not be returned until one sent for it and even then it was usually found in another household for tools and utensils were shared from one household to another without their owner's knowledge at times. This was not only because all the village members were related, and were entitled to the common pool of rights and privileges, but it was also an expression of the obligations of kinship and mutual interdependence. Pressure to share was so great that one could never say "No" without offending the person. The only way not to give was to deny having the item requested. But this was a difficult task as people knew a good deal about each other.

The constant borrowing and lending which took place could be considered an economical way to share resources in a small community rather than unnecessarily reduplicating, especially tools and utensils, from household to household. It also put the burden of acquiring tools and equipment on the more affluent and at the same time increased the dependence of the poorer on the richer. Thus it functioned as an "equalizing mechanism." The rich were unable to maintain their wealth, because of various

and constant demands on them. They had therefore to trade their wealth for social prestige (See Wolf 1966: 77-78).

Considerable exchange took place between households in the form of gift exchange. Exchange of presents among the Assyrians was very common and it was part of the visiting etiquette. For instance anyone visiting a person he/she had not seen for some time took a present along. It was considered very embarrassing to go "empty handed" as the saying goes. A few other occasions necessitating gift exchange are mentioned on the section on ceremonies and rituals.

Political Organization and Economic Differentiation

At the top of the Persian social hierarchy were those who did not have to work for a living. None of the members of this class lived in the village. The affluent "agha" had his residence in the town. He exercised power over the villagers through his agent the "kokhā." This was often an Assyrian who was appointed by the landlord rather than by being elected by the villagers themselves. He derived his power over the villagers because of his closer relation to the landlord. As to where he stood generally in terms of his loyalties, is best expressed by the Assyrian expression that "The grave of kokhā will be filled with snakes."

In the village the priest occupied the most

prestigious position. After him came the "kokhā."

There were no full time occupational specialists in the village. But economic differentiation existed between rich and poor peasants. The former were a small category of peasant freeholders; the latter were landless laborers. Sharecroppers occupied a midposition between the two. The affluent or rich peasants were always under pressure to help their poorer relatives. The priest, the kokha, and the freeholder peasant, especially if he had a number of able bodied men as close kin, had a greater say in village matters than the rest of the villagers.

Social Organization

The smallest significant social unit in the village was the extended family, where a man, his wife, his married sons, and his unmarried sons and daughters, with one or two close kin such as a widowed daughter or an orphaned niece (si. da.) lived under one roof. It was a patriarchal household in which the eldest male (father or eldest brother) held final authority over important matters concerning the family. The membership limits of such a household did not usually extend beyond first cousins (three generations). A village was composed of several such extended families related either through an agnatic line or through affinal ties. It was rare to find a household which was unrelated to others either by

blood or marriage. The chief difference between highland "tribal" and a plains peasant Assyrian's village was that in the former the patrilineal lineage was also the local landholding unit but in the latter the land was usually held by absentee landlords who were not Assyrian. They were, as has been noted, usually Azari Turks. Thus in the peasant village the patrilineal descent group, that is, the lineage became dispersed and less organized. The weakening of the patrilineal descent group in the peasant village was also evident from the fact that relations with the maternal kinfolk gained importance. For this reason to speak of "lineages" in connection with the Assyrian peasant village in Ūrmiyá is rather erroneous.

As a residential unit, the village community displayed a high degree of solidarity which the exchange relations within the village reinforced. If one member of the village did something wrong, the whole village was held responsible. On the other hand, if one of its members was wronged, the whole village pleaded for him. After one's own village, an individual's loyalty was to villages of one's own "river." For instance a person would identify herself as being from "Nazlu" or "Baranduz" river. After one's own village, people from the villages of the same "river" were the most preferred and usual marriage partners. If solidarity of the different social units is visualized in terms of ever

widening concentric units, then the range in order of solidarity is as follows: members of my family (extended), my village, people of my "river," Assyrians of the plain of Ūrmiyá, the Assyrian nation, my coreligionists; meaning Christians (this category contained local Armenians as well as all non-local Christians.

Kinship Terms

Assyrians have a unilineal and descriptive kinship terminology. Descent is traced through the male line. Maternal aunts and uncles are distinguished from the paternal ones; but grand parents are not. Similarly sex is distinguished in the terminology but seniority of offspring or siblings is not. There are fourteen primary terms which define the consanguineal kin. Terms for distant relatives are made by a combination of primary terms. The fourteen primary terms are:

- | | | |
|-----|----------|---------------|
| 1. | sávoonǎ | grandfather |
| 2. | nǎnoontǎ | grandmother |
| 3. | bǎbǎ | father |
| 4. | yimǎ | mother |
| 5. | broonǎ | son |
| 6. | brǎtǎ | daughter |
| 7. | nǎvigǎ | grandson |
| 8. | nǎvigtǎ | granddaughter |
| 9. | ǎkhoonǎ | brother |
| 10. | khǎtǎ | sister |

- | | | |
|-----|----------|----------------|
| 11. | māmoonā | paternal uncle |
| 12. | khāloovā | maternal uncle |
| 13. | āmtā | paternal aunt |
| 14. | khāltā | maternal aunt |

The combination of the term "broona" (son) and "khalta" (maternal aunt) produces a term that is roughly equivalent in English to cousin and so on.

Primary terms for affinal relations are:

- | | | | |
|----|------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. | idmā | husband's brother | (brother-in-law) |
| 2. | ēdāmtā | husband's sister | (sister-in-law) |
| 3. | bārikmāyā | wife's brother | (brother-in-law) |
| 4. | bārikhmetā | wife's sister | (sister-in-law) |
| 5. | khāmyānā | husband's or | |
| | | wife's father | (father-in-law) |
| 6. | khmātā | husband's or wife's | |
| | | mother | (mother-in-law) |
| 7. | gorā | husband | |
| 8. | bākhtā | wife | |

Godparents are referred to by special names too:

"ghārīvā" is the grooms "best man" at the wedding who also becomes his children's godfather. A newly wed woman is referred to by the term "kāloo;" meaning "bride;" a newly wed man by the term "khitnā" meaning "bridegroom."

Cousins once or twice removed are classed together but distinguished from the first cousins. First cousins are called "yali-d-māmounvāte" second and third cousins

are called "yāli-d-āmounvāte." People related through marriage refer to each other by the term "khnāmi." "Khnāmis" treat each other with respect and special consideration. It is considered disgraceful to become economically dependent on one's in-laws, although mutual help and cooperation are highly praised. Thus relations between families are regarded ideologically as egalitarian alliances, and so maintained in mutual aid practices, although the economic differences of rich, middle and poor peasant families within one village may hold in fact.

Relations based on closely shared obligations such as those maintained between relatives and friends are characterized by informality. Considerable joking, teasing, and even cursing takes place but only between such closely allied persons. Respect is preserved for strangers and the ruling class (e.g. landlords, police, etc.) Paradoxically, lack of respect is indicative of affection and closeness. For instance a person who has just finished telling a funny story to a group of kins and friends might hear the following curse as a compliment from one of them:

"May God strike you (meaning may you die) you are so pleasant!" (See Appendix C for a diagram on Kinship Terms)

Inheritance

According to "sūnhādūs," Assyrian civil and canon

law, only the blood relatives of a deceased person are entitled to inherit. Property descends from parents to children; the sons' share being twice that of the daughters. If there are no children, the parents of the deceased inherit; failing them, brothers and sisters or their descendants inherit. Upon her death a married woman's property goes to her children and if she has no children to her husband. Thus whatever property a woman brings to her marriage becomes part of the common pool of her husband's "lineage." In the nineteenth century the parents' death did not necessarily involve the breakup of the household. Usually the brothers stayed together and carried on as one economic unit so as to keep the land intact; unless there was too much friction between the members of the family or if there was an opportunity for one of them to move to town or elsewhere.

Marriage

Marriage was a contract between two households and the marriage partners were only one of the elements in that relationship. The "sūnhādūs" (Assyrian civil and canon law) provides a long list of kin with whom marriage is proscribed; but it was not obeyed to the letter. Excepting members of one's household which included paternal cousins, marriage with other relatives was allowed. Actually there was a strong preference for

village and "river" endogamy. According to Assyrian traditions, it is the groom's family who must give the marriage feast and provide the "trousseau." This included in the nineteenth century, the bridal gown, a few dresses for the bride, other items of clothing, jewelry such as golden rings, bracelets, watch, and necklace (a gold chain with a gold cross was essential). In addition dresses for the mother and sisters of the bride, shirts, even a whole suit of clothing for the father and each brother of the bride were included. The amount of jewelry that the groom's family bought for the girl indicated how high she stood in their estimation, and this was a very touchy business. The bride provided a dowry which was composed of household items such as linens and dishes and her own handicrafts.

Ceremonials and Rituals

Like all peasant religion, that of the Assyrians included an elaborate body of rituals. Only a few will be briefly described. Two great religious feasts were Easter and Christmas respectively. During Christmas every family had to visit relatives and friends and tender their holiday (festival) wishes in person. These visits had to be returned. For the first occasion rare delicacies were prepared in abundance and served to the guests. Sweet pastries, candies, wine, arag, and "măză," delicacies prepared from viands, vegetables and dairy

products were served. Christmas visiting hardly over, it was time for Easter visiting. Easter was called the "grand" feast; Christmas was the "little" feast. Easter was celebrated more lavishly, and many "memorial" gatherings were held in honor of the newly deceased persons. In addition to these occasions for formal visiting, informal visiting took place frequently. Not to visit meant not to care. Thus people were constantly complaining or apologizing to one another, as the case might be, for not having fulfilled the obligations of visiting as they should have.

Saints Days. There were numerous saints days which were occasions for communal "shāhrā" (fiests). The church of each village was named after a Saint; and on that Saint's day it was the "shāhrā" of the village. People from town and from other villages came to that village. The first thing to do was to go to church for the service and "dookhrānā" (offering). This was usually a lamb which was sacrificed at the doorstep of the church. Every person who had made a vow to the village Saint brought his offering and several lambs were slaughtered the same day. After the church service people went out on the meadow and played games or danced the traditional folk dances to the tune of "zoornā," a sort of bagpipe, and the drums. On that day the village was a great open house. Every one who came was fed and entertained whether

he knew his host or not.

It was common to make a "dookhrānā" to a Saint privately when it was not the Saint's day. This happened usually in a crisis situation such as sickness or a bad accident. Then a group of relatives would take the sacrifice to the designated shrine and keep a whole night's vigil there.

Fasting. Religious or private occasions for fasting were numerous. The total number of religious fasting days in a year as prescribed by "sūnhādūs" are 152. During the Fasts people abstained from eating animal products such as meat, dairy products, and even fish. The Fasts were observed diligently. The main items in the diet during the Lent were bread, lentils, vegetables, raisins, walnuts, almonds, fruits, and herbs. Fasting periods usually terminated with "shāhrā," religious festivals.

Rites of Passage

Birth, marriage, and death were occasions for holding formal ceremonies and always involved offering of "gifts." The marriage feast took several days. In case of death, the close relatives of the deceased observed a period of mourning for a year, during which the women wore black and both men and women abstained from attending happy occasions. Special rites were performed on the day of burial, and on the third, seventh, and fortieth day of

death. Food and black coffee were served to the people who came to pay their condolence. At the end of a year friends visited the bereaved with presents of a white headdress, material of a gay coloring, and a large cone of cane sugar in order to "lift the black."

Folk Medicine And Magic

Every village had one or two women who specialized in folk medicine and whom people sought out in time of sickness. In the nineteenth century praying, fasting, and making vows to saints were other means frequently sought to relieve a dear one from distress. People also believed in the evil eye, magic, and witchcraft. Those who believed they were so afflicted, sought the help of the village priest or deacon who provided them with the appropriate charms; usually these were prayers written on long strips of paper beautifully illuminated and enclosed in cases.

Frequent as these rituals and ceremonials were, they were supplimented by informal social visiting. Not to visit meant not to care. Consequently people made it a point to frequently visit with their relatives living in other villages or in town.

These ceremonials, rituals, and visiting patterns were a further means of promoting a feeling of solidarity within and among all the Assyrian communities in the Urmiya region. They helped to curb the divisive forces

emanating from economic differentiation in the village.

Town And Country

The Assyrian Christians of the town of Urmiya numbered one hundred households out of a total population of six to seven thousand households. They were essentially a class of artisans, carpenters, tailors and shoemakers; their occupation being determined to some extent by the prevailing inter-ethnic relations, which placed Christians into an "unclean" caste. Thus any occupation which involved the handling of foodstuff was out of the question. The town was divided into quarters. Minority groups such as Christians and Jews each occupied a special quarter. The Assyrian Christians of the town had their roots firmly established in the villages from where they came. Summer months were spent in the village with relatives. A large portion of winter provisions for consumption in the town were made and brought from the village. In fact with the food supply stored in the house for all winter, in village fashion, a town dweller had as little need to frequent the bazar as the villager. The town dwellers kept chickens and turkeys in their courtyard. A few even kept a cow or two for their daily supply of milk.

The Assyrian household in town was also an extended family. It usually included a relative from the village - a young boy or girl who were sent to learn a trade by

apprenticeship or study in any one the three principal schools: American Presbyterian; Lazarist Catholic, and Russian Orthodox. The movement between town and village was constant. Usually any villager who came to town to buy provisions, stayed a few days longer with his kin-folk. In case of serious illness the sick were brought to town where medication and doctors were available and they stayed with relatives.

Inter-ethnic Relations

The Assyrians of Urmiya, like other Christian minorities, were tolerated as an inferior section of the population. The sumptuary laws which were inherited from the pre-Islamic era were still in effect. A Christian was prohibited from showing any signs of economic prosperity. Therefore he was required to wear clothes made of inexpensive material and to be distinguishable, he was to wear a red mark on his chest. He was also not permitted to ride on horseback or build his churches or dwellings higher than those of the Muslims. Upon meeting a Muslim, he was to dismount (his donkey or mule) and stand with arms folded across his chest, eyes respectfully downcast until the Muslim passed by. According to Persian custom this was a posture an inferior person took in the presence of a superior. He was not to say the greeting word "salam" which means "peace," because from the Muslim point of view there was no peace

between him and a Christian. The Christians had to intern their deads in secret and without mourning. If a Christian woman married a Muslim, she was entitled to all the property belonging to her extended family. Indications are that before the interference of Western powers in the affairs of Iran and the establishment of mission stations among the Assyrians of Urmiya, discrimination towards the Christians was mild because the Christian minority did not challenge the prerogatives of the Muslim population. In fact the Turkish peasantry in Urmiya were more distinguishable by the lack of visible prerogatives vis a vis Christians. The peasantry whether Muslim or Christian suffered alike from the excesses of landlords and government. The peaceful state of affairs was also owed to lack of extended contact or competition between Muslim and Christian peasants. The peasant village of either religion with its subsistence economy, was a whole onto itself. Contact between Muslims and Christians occurred mostly in the town market and then only occasionally. The Assyrians as a religious community with a millet status were also given autonomy in settling their own disputes and effecting marriage, divorce and inheritance procedures through their own clergy, which made them even less dependent on the institutions of the dominant society in regard to internal concerns.

The structure of Islamic states both in Ottoman Turkey and Persia possessed the characteristics of a "plural" society in which different ethnic groups coexisted side by side without taking part in the institutions of one another and only come together in the market place (Furnival 1956). In the case of these Middle Eastern states, however, the dominant group was not a colonial power but the Sunni (Turkey) or Shiite (Persia) Muslim ruling class.

The progress of Western capitalism in the Middle East at the turn of this century resulted in population dislocation and the incorporation of the Assyrian peasantry into the capitalist market economy.

By the end of the nineteenth century the introduction of Western industrial products had already ruined the native handicraft industries. Growing dependence on cash forced the migration of peasant Assyrians to towns. The men found jobs mostly as "helpers" to truck drivers. The latter worked in the transportation business for a salary, carrying cargo from town to town. Later the Assyrian helper was promoted to the job of "truck driver." A few managed to buy a truck and work independently. Those who prospered bought more trucks and established a large business for themselves.

Migrant labor has forced the men to be absent from their families for long periods of times. This has had

considerable social effects on family life in general.

The urbanization of the Assyrians has meant the depletion of the village population. In the early years of 1970 there were only twelve villages in which a substantial number of Assyrian families lived. These twelve villages had an Assyrian population ranging from twenty to a hundred families per village. The Assyrian population of the town of Urmiya had increased to 850 families compared to 100 in the year 1900. Most of the town dwellers earned their living by doing clerical type jobs. About a hundred families lived on the money the men earned as truck or taxi drivers. About fifty families lived on the money which was sent by their men who worked as migrant laborers in Kuwait or other countries in the Persian Gulf.⁵

NOTES

- ¹The information in this chapter is collected from interviews, personal memories, and mainly from the following books: Maclean & Browne 1892; Fisher 1968; and Adams 1900.
- ²During the late nineteenth and more so in the beginning of the twentieth century the separation of dwelling quarters from the cooking and bakery part of the house was already taking place. The "beta" came to be used more and more as a kitchen, particularly during the summer months.
- ³There is a considerable difference between Persian and Assyrian food. The typical Persian spices such as nutmeg, turmeric, saffron, cinnamon, etc. which are common in most Persian recipes, are almost never found in Assyrian recipes. Instead the Assyrians use a variety of dried or fresh herbs such as basil, coriander, dill, tarragon and other varieties not found in North America. Hot red pepper and tomato paste are also commonly used.
- ⁴There seems to have been variation on the amount of taxes levied on different villages. An Assyrian informant from the village of Gavilan states that in this village the Assyrian peasants paid the aghas 10% on the crop of the fields on level plains and 5% on those on hilly ground. Moreover, he maintains this was as a kind of payment for agha's protection of the fields from thieves and robbers.
- ⁵I take this opportunity to thank Mr. John Moradkhan for providing me with information and statistics on the contemporary Assyrian community in Urmiya.

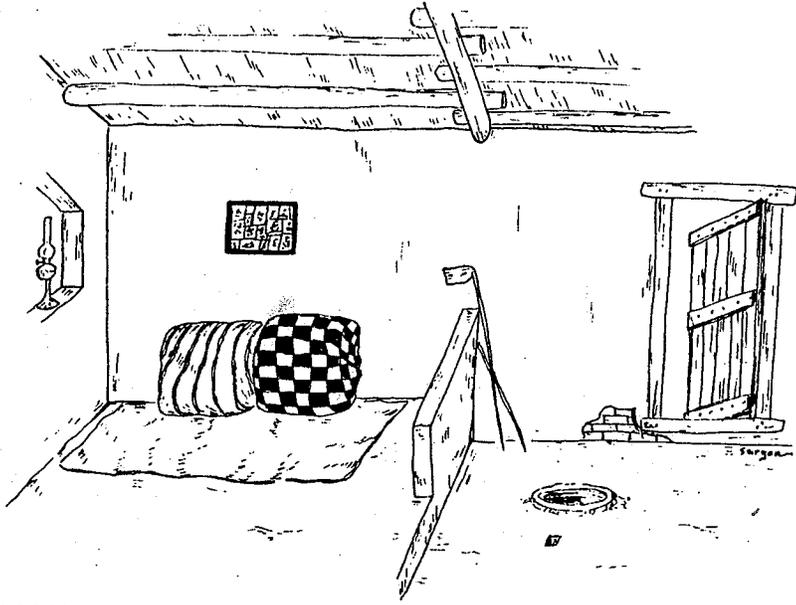


Fig. I. "Beta" cushions on the left, "tanura" on the right.



Fig. II. Cool cellar for hanging "tlui," wines, pickles etc.

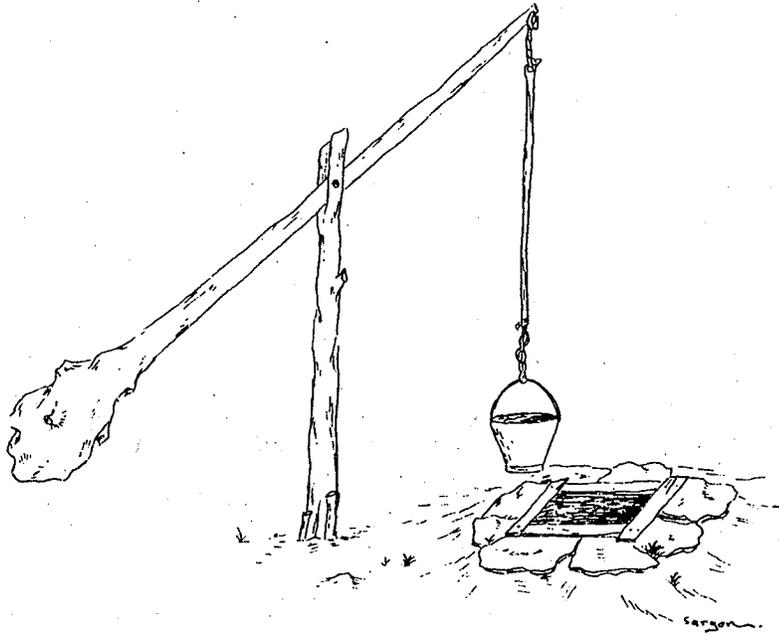


Fig. III Water well.

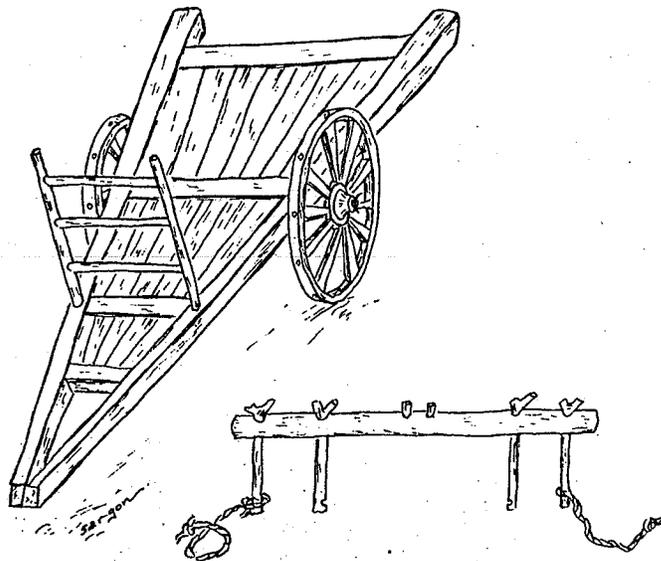


Fig. IV. "Gardoon".



Fig. V. Women carrying water from the water spring.



Fig. VI. Fun ride on "jarjar."



Fig. VII "Karma": Vineyard.

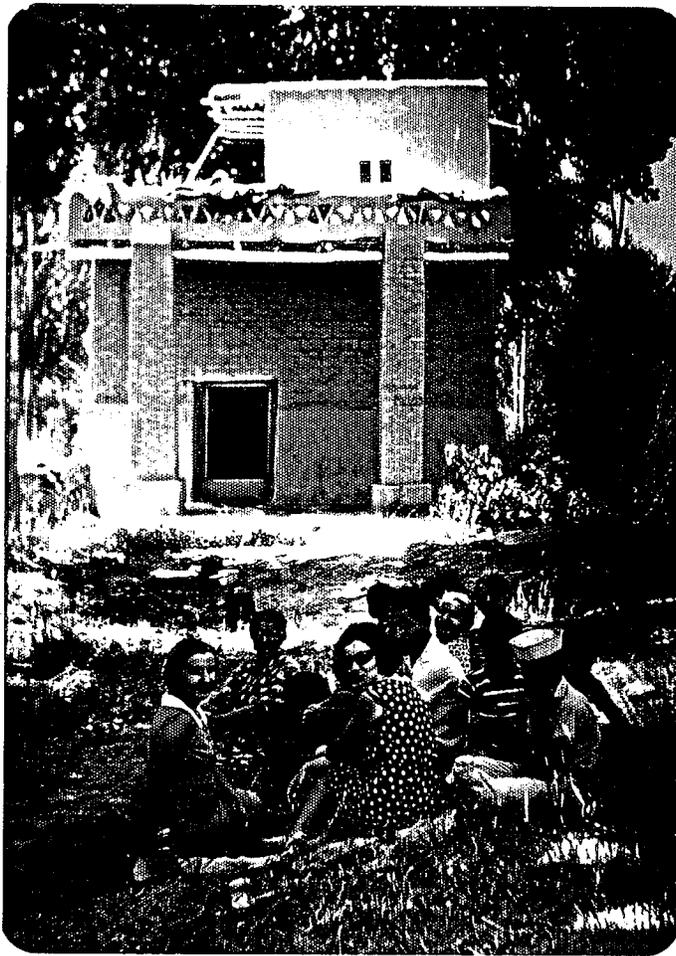


Fig. VIII "Kola": The dwelling place at the vineyard.

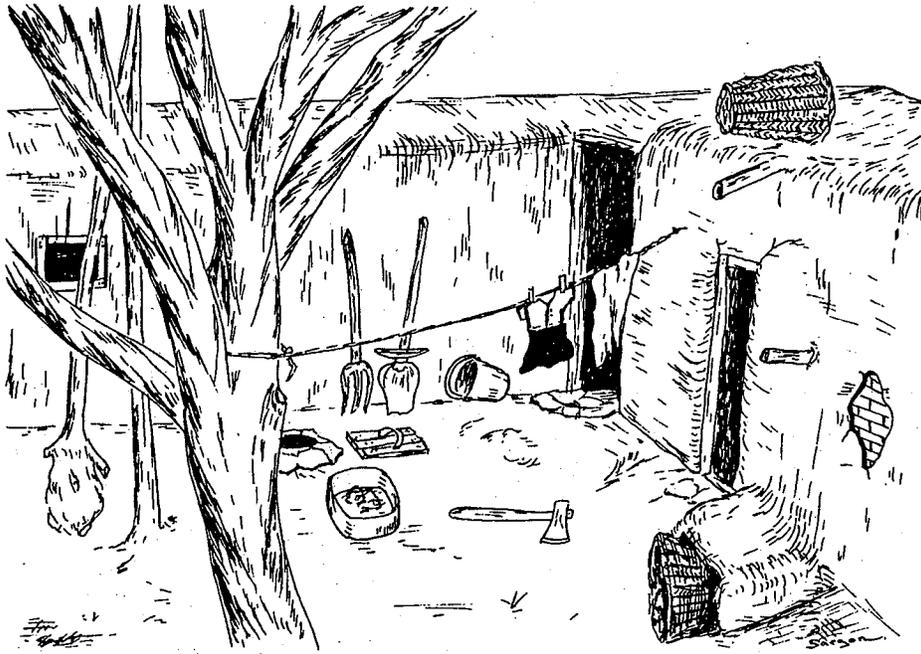


Fig. IX. Village Courtyard.



Fig. X. "Meta": The Churn.



Fig. XI The bread baking team. (Courtesy of Mr. W. Daniel)



NESTORIAN CHRISTIAN LADY.

Fig. XII. Nestorian Christian lady. (the highlander costume)

(reproduced from Adams 1900:220)



Fig. XIII. Traditional plains costume.

(courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Georges of Chicago)



Fig. XIV. Raban Hormoz: Ancient Shrine.

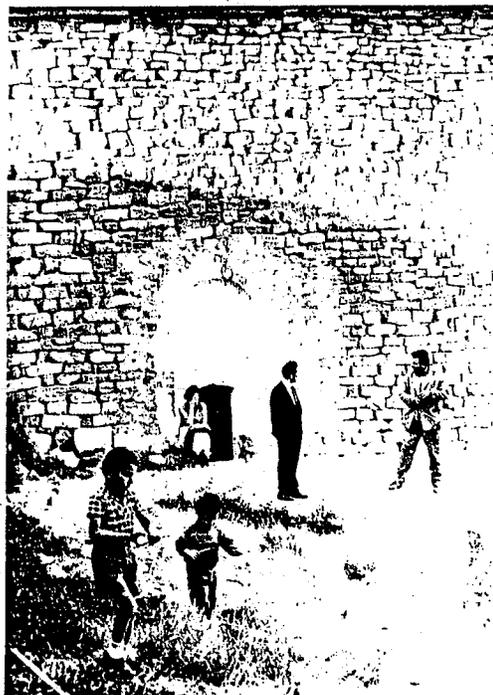


Fig. XV. Mar Sargis: Ancient Shrine.

PART II

ASSYRIANS IN NORTH AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

In the following chapters the proletarianization of the Assyrian peasantry is discussed.

As noted earlier, the Assyrians were uprooted from their former homes during World War I. Members of this ruined and dispersed peasant and pastoral community joined the trek towards Europe and North America where they were drafted into the cheap reserve labor force. The bulk of the Assyrian immigrants in the United States found work in factories particularly in the auto industry. A colony ventured into Western Canada and settled there as family farmers; but failed due to the harshness of the environment and lack of efficient farming techniques at the time. We will also note that the Assyrians still apply their traditional method to improve their status. This is by specializing as clerks, teachers, physicians etc. through technical or professional education. In modern times this has meant putting greater emphasis on providing the youth with higher education.

The pattern of immigration, and the adjustment of the Assyrian immigrant communities in North America are discussed in the following pages.

CHAPTER VI

LOCAL AND OVERSEAS MIGRATION

Local Migration Patterns

There had been, perhaps from antiquity, a gradual but continuous local population movement from the valleys of the Hákkiārī towards the surrounding plains. One such migratory route moved from the overpopulated valleys of Hákkiārī towards the uplands of Dernāye and Tergāvār on the Turco-Persian frontier; and from the uplands to the plain of Salmas and Ūrmiyā; and thence from the plains to the town of Ūrmiyā (Beynon 1944:268). Following this route transformed semi-sedentary pastoralists into full fledged agriculturalists or into town dwelling artisans. Others of the Assyrian mountaineers descended the mountains and settled directly in the town with the help of relatives who were already established there. One of my informants could trace his family history three hundred years back to the time his forefathers left the mountains to settle in a village in the Plain of Urmiya.

Extensive population dislocation beyond the local boundary occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, as political tensions made life difficult for the Christian minority. During the massacre of Bādr-Khān in 1843, those among the

Assyrians of Turkish Kurdistan who escaped death fled to Russia and settled there. As Turkish and Kurdish oppression continued, more of the Assyrians who were driven out of their villages found shelter in Russia.

Immigration from Ūrmiyā to Russia was economically motivated. To work in Tiflis as migrant laborer during winter months when men were free from agricultural pursuits became a routine in the life of the Assyrian peasantry during the nineteenth century. Some decided to stay in Russia and as early as the first half of Nineteenth century there were a hundred Assyrian families settled in villages around Erivan (Assyrian Star 1972:3). These were later joined by refugees from Turkish Kurdistan referred to earlier.

During World War I, when the Russian army evacuated Āzerbāyjān in 1917, about 10,000 panic-stricken Assyrians followed the retreating army to Russia (Joseph 1961:132). Some returned a few years later; others settled in Russia close to Moscow. But around 1940 a few thousand Assyrians were deported from Russia on the grounds that they had not yet acquired Russian citizenship and that they displayed pro-Persian sentiments.

Overseas Migration

Overseas migration to Europe and North America began during the second quarter of nineteenth century. The first Assyrians to visit Western countries were young men

who were sent by the Western missionaries to be trained in mission schools for mission work in their native country. Through them the Assyrians learned about work opportunities and the possibility of making "quick money" in North America. This started the wave of migrant laborers who travelled to the industrial cities of Eastern United States and Canada to work in the factories. The intention was to work for a year or two, save money, return home and live as a prosperous landlord from then on. It had become a usual and sad scene in the villages of Ūrmiyá during the prewar era to have a young man married and shortly afterwards sent abroad on his cash seeking enterprise. Some of these men chose to stay in North America and asked their families to join them. Some were never heard from again; others returned and invested in land as they had planned. It is said that another category of men who ventured overseas or to Russia to make quick money were impostors who posed as priests and collected money for fictitious churches or orphanages.

During the prewar era overseas migration for the purpose of permanent settlement was small compared to the rush that followed the uprooting of the Assyrians after World War I. The stream of immigration overseas would have continued at a high rate after the War were it not for the American restrictive immigration laws that came into effect after 1925. But Assyrians continued to immigrate to the

United States within the allowances made by the American quota. A few desperate men were said to have been smuggled in, literally rolled in rugs.

Overseas immigration was carried on an individual family basis. The usual procedure was for one able bodied man in the family or a group of two or three men (either relatives or friends) to travel together, establish themselves overseas, and then send money home and gradually bring the rest of the extended family to the newly adopted country; a process which is referred to as "chain migration." Some social scientists maintain that the American immigration laws which favored categories of relatives led to the "chain migration" phenomenon (See Aswad 1974:3). Undoubtedly the immigration laws had a great role in channeling immigration, but one has also to consider the migratory habits of immigrants themselves. As far as Assyrians are concerned, "chain Migration" has been the traditional pattern by which population dispersion has taken place. It was through this method that the Assyrian mountaineer moved to the plain village and from there to the regional town.

There is one unique incident of a mass migration in the history of Assyrians of Persia which took place even before the World War I incidents. It was a colony which was established in Western Canada in 1903. This is all the more remarkable because very few Assyrians had ventured

into Canada at the time. The few who had, did not stay more than a few years in the larger cities of Eastern Canada like Toronto and Montreal.

It is worth probing the factors which motivated the pre-war Assyrian generation to forsake their ancestral homeland, the ancient shrines, the vineyards and orchards that their forefathers had raised with so much care, and the beautiful plain of Ūrmiyā to settle in a foreign land: in smoke filled industrial cities of North America as mere factory laborers. Undoubtedly the increased oppression on the part of the Muslim population towards the Christian minority prompted the latter to search for an asylum elsewhere. But the false propaganda portraying America as a "paradise" provided a further incentive. The Assyrians were given a completely idealistic picture of North America. An Assyrian Christian scholar who settled in the United States describes the impressions Assyrians had of America in the following way:

They are told that this great country is but a little island, inhabited by five thousand Christian missionaries, whose entire time is given to prayer, fasting and preaching; that the country is ruled by a Christian government, free from all evils and abuses; and that nobody plays golf, drinks whiskey, or smokes. (Emhart and Lamsa 1026:83).

Furthermore, the generation of Assyrians who were educated in mission schools became alienated from the traditions of their forefathers. The missionaries themselves were aware

of this danger. Missionaries A. Maclean and W. Browne wrote: "The Syrians should not be so much over-educated as to be ashamed of their own country, and to ape Europeans" (Maclean & Browne 1892:179). But this is what in fact happened. The younger generation of Assyrians developed the same kind of disdain towards the rituals and customs of their forefathers as some of the Western Missionaries, particularly the Presbyterians, did. The intolerance of the Presbyterian missionaries toward the Nestorian customs of fasting, kissing the cross, burning incense, and other rituals was made explicit in their reaction. In this connection missionary Stoddard wrote: "We strip off all their righteousness, tear away all their hopes and arraign them as condemned criminals at the bar of an offended God" (Joseph 1961:70). The younger generation became no less scornful towards the Muslims whom they came to regard as inferior, ignorant oppressors. Much to the grief of the elders, they became disrespectful towards the traditional wisdom and behaved arrogantly both towards their own people and the local Muslim population. The identification with Westerners and the Western way of life was not limited to Assyrian youth alone. In the large cities of Persia the same phenomenon was taking place among the younger Muslim generation belonging to the wealthy classes who were beginning to have contact with Western ideas. This trend was to continue and reach the

larger middle class sector in the twentieth century (Nirumand 1969:170-173).

At the end of nineteenth century the younger generation of Assyrians were deserting the old Nestorian Church to join the Western denominations. There was one dream left for the impressionable Assyrian youth: To leave home, and go to study and live in America.

Present Immigration Patterns

Immigration overseas has continued steadily and increased in recent years due to the turmoil in Middle East.

The majority of Assyrians who chose to settle in United States during the first half of this century were among the relatively prosperous freehold peasants and well to do town dwellers. In recent years they have been also among the members of educated and professional elite and their migration to Western countries illustrates the "brain drain" phenomenon taking place in third world countries in general.

The restrictive American immigration laws do not absorb all the Assyrians who wish to settle in that country. Therefore they have been obliged to look elsewhere for a home. This has further dispersed the nation. The Assyrians of Iraq have found a new homeland in Australia where they have been immigrating in large numbers in the last decade. Some of the Assyrians of

Hakkiari presently living in Syria and Iraq have been able to immigrate to Canada. The majority have settled in Ontario.

As a result of the Kurdo-Iraqi war in Northern Iraq in the first years of 1970, about 2000 Assyrians whose villages were destroyed in the fighting fled to Lebanon. A number of plane loads of these refugees have been brought to United States by the efforts of the Assyrian American Federation and its affiliate welfare organization. Still more are expected to arrive.

Massive dislocations of this nature have caused great concern among those Assyrians who oppose the desertion of ancestral homelands.

CHAPTER VII

AN ASSYRIAN FARMING COLONY IN WESTERN CANADA

The establishment of colonies overseas through organized, communal action is unusual in the history of Assyrian overseas migration. The usual method has invariably been resettlement on an individual family basis; although the different families do eventually gravitate to each other to form a bloc settlement. The Assyrian colony in Western Canada remains a unique venture from the point of view of its scale. The master mind behind this "large" scale settlement was a dynamic Assyrian medical missionary by the name of Dr. Nimrūd.* It was his charisma as a foreign educated physician and missionary that made such a scheme possible. He was born in the village of "Mātā" in a traditional peasant family. At the time the whole village belonged to the Church of the East, better known as the "Nestorian" Church. It is for this reason that his parents objected when Nimrūd decided to join the Presbyterian mission school in the town of Ūrmiyā. But he was a determined young man and after graduation he not only converted his own village to the Presbyterian denomination, but

*Names of people and places in this chapter are fictitious or have been changed.

was instrumental in converting a few other villages also. Dr. Nimrūd later came to the United States and graduated as a medical missionary with the financial help of the American Presbyterian mission board. While in the United States he travelled to several cities in the United States and Canada on lecture tours and came to know about the opportunities for settlement in North America. Meanwhile he obtained his American citizenship.

In 1902 Dr. Nimrūd returned to his native country and decided to establish an Assyrian colony in California. But on contacting the American immigration officials he was told that, "There were no longer lands sufficient in size and fertility for a settlement." He had better luck with Canadian immigration officials whose government's policy was to settle and develop Western Canada into a major wheat and cereal producing region in the country, and who did not discriminate at the time, against immigrants of a different creed or country (See Hall 1975). The colony was designated a place in the fertile but wooded region of the Canadian prairies. However the Assyrian colonists did not choose Canada as their final abode; rather, as a stepping stone to take them to their intended destination, California.

Composition

The colonists were composed of thirty-six men, women, and children. Besides Dr. Nimrūd and his wife

were his two brothers and their immediate families. Two distant male cousins (Sāyād and his paternal uncle) who lived in the village of Mātā. Another distant cousin, Ābūnā, with his wife and adopted son, who had moved to the town of Ūrmiyā, also joined the colonists. Two brothers, (the Chālābis) were picked up from the village of "Āynā" which did not belong to the same "river" as Mātā. Two other brothers joined the colonists in a city located north of Ūrmiyā. These two brothers were born and raised in Mātā and were therefore related to the Nimrūd family. One lonely woman who had no kinfolk volunteered to join in too. An Azari Turk asked to be taken along and so he was. Information about the rest was not available at the time of research. Generally speaking, the colonists consisted of members of nuclear families or more often clusters of relatives in the agnatic line such as brothers or "cousins." Most of them were from the village of Mata in the sense that they were born and raised there even though some did not live there at the time of immigration. Few colonists brought their families along; they preferred to get established first. The extended family arrangement back home made this feasible. Economically speaking, the majority of the colonists were among the relatively prosperous freehold peasants or town dwellers who could pay their fare.

The Journey

The journey was started on six "ārābānās (a one horse cart). After many weeks of adventurous travel the band reached the Russian boundary. The travellers took the train from Russia to Hamburg via Poland. In Hamburg, quite appropriately, they boarded the ship Assyria and landed on Canadian soil in Halifax on New Year's Day in 1903. They took the train to Winnipeg and spent the winter there. How they spent that winter is not known.* With the spring breakup in April, they took the train to Saskatoon where they bought hastily whatever equipment they could afford. An old trail was followed to get them to the Saskatchewan River. They ferried the river and landed a few miles away from what later became "Plains City." They raised their tents on a site which was later to become one of the city's major streets.

Pioneer Days

Homesteads were immediately filed on. The land was already surveyed and quarter sections marked out. As they had a choice in selecting their quarter sections, they tried to select adjacent plots in order to be near

*At the time of research none of these settlers were alive or living in Canada. The information on the pioneer days was based on what other informants had heard or remembered.

one another. The site they chose consisted of the lowlands close to the river and the adjacent higher ground. The land bordering the river had good soil but was exposed to frosts. The land located in the higher altitude did not run this risk, but it was stoney and the undulating relief made farming difficult. The men paid \$10 for each quarter section and preempted another section for \$3.00.

As soon as homesteads were acquired the settlers began to build a solid, one storey stone house on Dr. Nimrud's quarter section. It was a thirty by fifty foot building; the walls were two feet thick. This was where all the thirty-six colonists spent their first winter. But in the meantime they abandoned the tents and lived in a dug-out on the side of the hill.

In 1903 there were very few farmers in the area. The closest town was some miles away from the Assyrian encampment. The town had experienced a period of boom a decade earlier, but in 1903 it was experiencing a setback as the railway had bypassed it in favor of other cities. Movement of cargo constituted a problem and imported goods were very expensive due to the high freight rates. Farmers were therefore not attracted to the area because they could not market their produce if they settled there. The Assyrian colonists engaged in subsistence farming and for their source of cash they

went to town for any jobs available in unsilled labor, an arrangement with which they were already familiar. The colony prospered in the first few years. The land was virgin and it produced much more than they had ever had in one season back home. Even work in town was much more remunerative compared to the old country. In the meantime the Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) officials bought large tracts of land around the Assyrian homesteads and to the utter dismay of the inhabitants of the nearby town, decided to divert a line which was supposed to go through the town, to this area. In a short time a settlement arose which in a year developed into the prosperous town of "Plains City." New business and people mostly from England, or British settlers from Eastern Canadian provinces poured in. In March of 1906, a year after the rail reached the area, the settlement acquired the status of a village. Four months later the population had reached to 565, and the village was officially incorporated as a town. This gave the Assyrians plenty of opportunity to find work. However since they were not literate in English, they were given only unskilled work. Some hauled bricks with a team of oxen; others laid water and sewer lines, or found other types of work in the booming construction market; and on the railway. Abuna, Dr. Nimrud's distant cousin, opened a candy store. He also invested in the building of a

billiard parlor. Some of the Assyrian settlers invested in land because to own land had a high value in their traditional mode of life. Those who had not brought their families over yet, had an opportunity to save cash and by 1906 they were ready to send for their families or relatives. The three Nimrud brothers formed a small corporation. They bought a steamer*, and a set of ploughs. The idea was to plough other farmers fields and work as "landbreakers." Their very first attempt was a disaster. A British farmer hired them; but the steamer failed to operate shortly after the work had started. As they did not know how to operate the machine properly or to repair it, they were told to be gone. In the Fall they made a second attempt. They bought a separator (a machine which separated the wheat from the straw) and instead of the steamer they used fourteen teams of oxen. This failed too. It was a wet Fall and the oxen ate from the crop. The business seemingly failed because as a British informant put it, "It was out of proportion to their experience and the farming situation in the area where farming was still done on a small family scale."

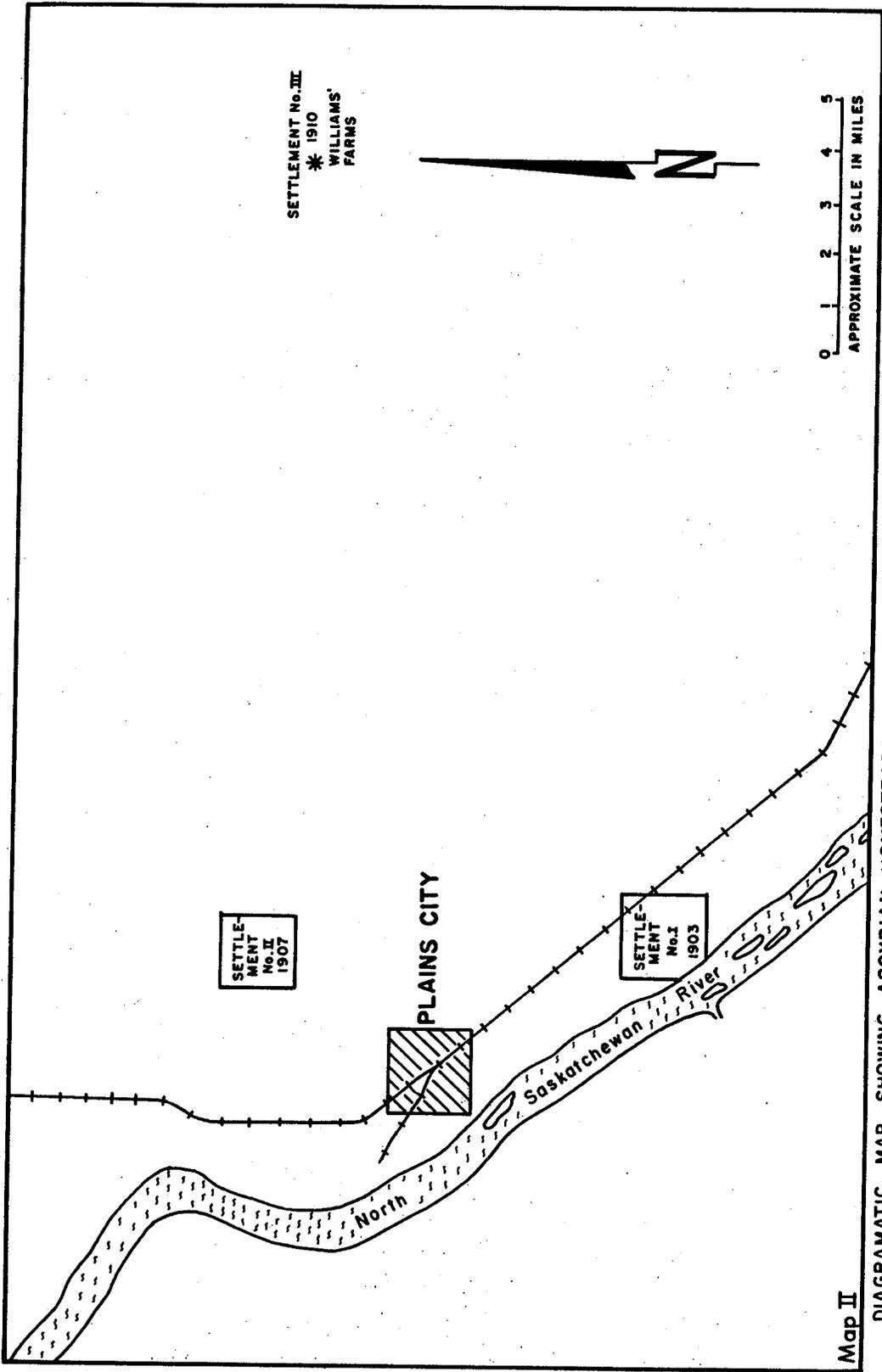
*A steamer was a huge machine which operated with a steam engine. It was a puller to which a set of ploughs could be attached in time of ploughing, or a separator in time of threshing.

Second Colony: 1907

In 1906 the settlers gave Dr. Nimrud passage money to bring some of the members of their families to Canada. Dr. Nimrud went to Persia and returned in 1907 with forty settlers. Not all of these were members of the families of the first settlers. Other Assyrians had decided to join the colony in Plains City. The second colony boarded a cargo boat from Hamburg to Canada in order to make the journey less expensive. The trip was very unpleasant; it was cold and uncomfortable. The boat included livestock as its cargo. During the stops in the rail journey across Canada the colonists had to stay at the depots instead of hotels. Their food consisted of a loaf of bread per day. The hardships of the journey made some of the settlers suspicious and resentful towards Dr. Nimrud as they felt that their passage money was adequate to provide them with better means of transportation and decent accomodation. To make matters worse, it seems that due to travel mixups, the band was delayed for a month in the port of Hull in England where whatever money they had was used up. Their relatives in Canada had to mortgage their homesteads and send more money to England in order to get the travellers into Canada. Dr. Nimrud tried to raise money from charity organizations, apparently with little success. These incidents left the colony in difficult

economic and tense social conditions.

The new Assyrian settlers selected a site seven to eight miles to the north-east of Plains City. The land proved to be of much better quality. It was flat, stoneless, and had excellent soil. But the crops on it were exposed to freezing. A few of the settlers who were exasperated with the stones and the swarm of mosquitoes near the river plots, abandoned their homesteads and relocated in the second site (See map, next page). But good land was not enough to ameliorate the situation for the Canadian farmer in those days. With the agricultural technology limited to human and animal power, it was not easy to break a sufficient amount of land for cultivation, particularly if the unit of labor was the family. On the other hand, quarter section farms were inadequate for dry farming. A half section would be viable but then it needed more labor than one family could afford. The government expected to develop Western Canada into a farming area, but yet it was not prepared to subsidize the farmers. Consequently approximately 57% (six out of ten) farmers failed and moved out to towns (McGinnis 1975). The Assyrian settlers were no exception. Like most farmers they were part time laborers, and as farmers they practiced mixed farming and livestock raising for subsistence. Year after year the crops failed; they were hit by frosts before the



Map II
DIAGRAMATIC MAP SHOWING ASSYRIAN HOMESTEADS IN THE RURAL DISTRICT OF PLAINS CITY - CANADA

farmers had a chance to take them off the ground. A few times Dr. Nimrud procured clothing and essential utensils for the destitute Assyrian families from the Salvation Army.

A New Venture

In 1910 the provincial government paid Dr. Nimrud a good price for his homestead because his land was selected for a government project. Dr. Nimrud decided to move to California and establish a new Assyrian colony there. He urged the Assyrians of Plains City to join him. Only two men volunteered: one was his brother; the other was Sayad's uncle. More people would have joined the group if it were not for the feeling of mistrust that had grown among some of the settlers towards Dr. Nimrud after the Canadian experience. The usual comment was, "Maybe it will be even worse there." Their misgivings were not altogether misplaced. Dr. Nimrud and his followers went to Chicago first, where they contacted the colonizing agent of the Santa Fe Railroad Company. The agent advised them to contact a man in San Francisco. This man owned a large tract of land in Delhi. Recruiting more Assyrian men on the way, Dr. Nimrud and his companions (all except one man had left their families behind) went to San Francisco. The man they were advised to see urged them to buy his land claiming that it was as good as the land around Turlock.

He showed Dr. Nimrud pictures of acreage in Fresno and Turlock which he claimed to be Delhi land. So the Assyrian colonists bought the land for \$100 an acre. However once they reached Delhi, they discovered that the land was sandy and practically useless for farming particularly because there was no water for irrigation. The men, except Dr. Nimrud, and his family, his brother and his family, Sayad's uncle, and the Assyrian who had brought his family along from Chicago and had no place to return to, packed up and returned to their previous homes. As to Dr. Nimrud and company, they finally managed to settle in Turlock, and this area became in later years the center of the largest Assyrian farming community in North America; but this is another story.

In subsequent years more Assyrians joined the colony in Plains City, either on their own or through the help of relatives already settled in Plains City. The diverse origin of these is indicative of the spacial dispersion of the Assyrian nation in general, especially after World War I. At this point it should be mentioned that here only the settlement history of those who chose to stay permanently in Plains City is given (little is known about the rest).

In 1905 the nephew (br. so.) of the two Chalabi brothers mentioned earlier decided to move from the United States and join Dr. Nimrud's colony. In 1910

he helped bring his brother William who was living in the village of "Ayna," and who was married and had three children, to Plains City. William could not find land close to the other Assyrian settlers and his homestead was isolated; (see map) but he became the only successful farmer "because his homestead was on a slope and his crops escaped freezing." In 1972 his son George and his grandson were among the most prosperous farmers in Western Canada.

Sárgis, an Assyrian from the Plains of Ūrmiyá, immigrated to New Britain, United States in 1900 along with three Assyrian priests. The four men homesteaded in partnership. Sargis could not farm. He left for Ohio and worked there as a laborer for three years. Then he heard about the Assyrian colony in Canada and joined it in 1904. He homesteaded and in 1906 asked Dr. Nimrūd to bring his wife from the old country. Later he also brought the son of his sister-in-law (wife's sister's son) claiming that he was his own son so that the immigration authorities would allow the young man entrance into the country. Sargis moved to town eventually and became a buggy driver in the city which in those days functioned as a taxi.

Sleebá, one of the Assyrian refugees from Gávár who was helped to immigrate to Chicago by the Red Cross, joined the Assyrian colony in Plains City in 1912. Later

he sent money to the old country and brought his wife and his brother to Canada. Sleebā[✓] opened a grocery store in Plains City but went bankrupt and was reduced to peddling.

In 1923-24 twelve settlers came from Marseilles, France. They were all originally from the Ūrmiyā region, but during World War I they had fled and lived for several years in refugee camps, and then had gradually made their way from Baghdad to Marseilles, where there was a small Assyrian settlement at that time. These twelve individuals belonged to two families. One family consisted of a man by the name of Yosip, his wife, and two children, and a niece he raised as his own daughter after the death of her father (his brother). Yosip had sent his younger brother to Canada with the 1907 colony, and was now joining him. The second family consisted of the four Sāyād brothers. The history of the migration of the Sāyād family starts with the 1902 Colony. There were six brothers in this family. The eldest brother with the uncle (Fa. br.) as mentioned earlier, left the village of Mātā[✓] with the first colony in 1902. In 1906 the eldest Sāyād brother helped his younger brother to come to Canada with the second colony. The two brothers homesteaded and sent money back to their parents in the old country. As a consequence their father became so prosperous in Mata that he became unwilling to immigrate to Canada. Instead he asked his two sons to return to

the old country. After the two brothers got their passports and were ready to return, World War I broke out in Europe and they heard about the turmoil in Persia, and were obliged to stay in Plains City. The Sāyād family survived the War in the old country and the two Sayad brothers in Canada sent money and helped the family get to Marseilles where, in 1923, they were awaiting their visas for Canada. However, the old Sayad had trachoma and was forbidden entrance into Canada. Since mother Sayad refused to leave the old man behind, one of the brothers decided to stay in Marseilles and came to Canada after the parents passed away several years later. The other three brothers one of whom was married and had a small child, resumed their journey and reached Plains City in 1924. They also brought a young woman as a wife for their uncle, since he had asked them to do so. The matchmaking was arranged by the parents of the girl and the Sayads who had become friends while staying in Baquba refugee camp. In 1936 one of the Sayad brothers who was unmarried, returned to Marseilles, and with the recommendation of his parents married a distant cousin and brought her with him to Plains City.

In 1937 Peerā joined the colony from England. Peerā was originally from the "Tyari" tribe residing in Turkish Kurdistan. He had served as a levy during the British occupation of Iraq, and was brought to England

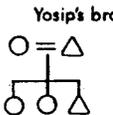
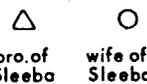
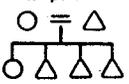
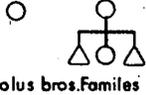
by his superior officer after the British pulled out of Iraq in 1933. He resided in England for two years and worked in the house of his former officer until the latter arranged a visa for him to emigrate to Canada. An Assyrian in Canada was needed to sponsor Peera before immigration authorities would allow him entrance into the country. The eldest Sayad brother who had helped many people volunteered to do so.

The latest addition to Plains City was a young man named Shlīmoon from Syria. He too was originally from the Tyári clan and related to Peerā. They are clan cousins. He came as a visitor and stayed at Peerā's for some time. But he was determined not to return to the Assyrian camps in Syria. However the regulations made it virtually impossible for him to obtain an immigration visa. His efforts to stay with the help of the Assyrians in Canada failed. Then he married a Canadian and so was enabled to stay (See the diagram on next page showing successive immigration).

Many more Assyrian immigrants came to Plains City. However the rate of emigration was much higher than that of immigration. Most of the Assyrian families applied for immigration visas to the United States and when the visas were granted, they left Plains City to join their relatives or other Assyrians living in the United States, the state of California in particular. At the time of

Successive Immigration of Assyrian Families or Individuals to Plains City.

Chart II

YEAR	ASSYRIANS FROM THE PLAINS OF URMIYA				ASSYRIAN HIGHLANDERS OF PERSIA	ASSYRIAN HIGHLANDERS OF TURKEY
1972						△ Clan cousin to Peera
1954	△ Last Sayad brother					
1937						△ Peera of "Tyari"
1936	○ Bride for one of the Sayad bros.					
1923-24	 <p>3 Sayad bros. Sayad's nephew</p>	○ Bride for Chalabi bro.		 <p>Yosip's bro.</p>	△ Polus' nephew (2)	 <p>bro. of Sleeba wife of Sleeba</p>
1921			△ Son of Sargis' sister in-law brought as own son		△ Polus' nephew (1)	
1910-12		 <p>Bro. to Chalabi nephew</p>				△ Sleeba "Rayat" from "Gawar"
1906-7	△ Sayad jun. bro.		 <p>Wife & Children of Sargis</p>	△ Yosip	 <p>Polus bros. Families</p>	
1904-5		△ Chalais' nephew	△ Sargis			
1902	△ Sayad & Uncle	 <p>Chalabi bros.</p>			 <p>Polus bros.</p>	

research (1973) all the Assyrians of Plains City except the two Tyari men had relatives in the United States. Those who chose to stay permanently in Plains City were either prosperous enough not to want to risk a change, or their immigration applications to the United States had been rejected.

Demography

At the time of research in 1973 the Assyrian population of Plains City consisted of 46 men, women, and children.* Of these 26 were full Assyrians. None of the 1902 settlers remained in the city. They had either outmigrated or were dead. From the 1907 colony one elderly lady about 75 years old, remained in the city.

The number of Assyrians in the pioneer generation (those who were not born in Plains City) was thirteen. These were all full Assyrian. The number of first generation Assyrians born in Plains City was fourteen. All except one were full Assyrian. This is indicative that the pioneer generation of settlers were married predominantly to Assyrians. The number of second generation Assyrians was nineteen. These consisted mostly of either preschoolers or school age children, and were all half Assyrian indicating that the first generation Assyrians born in Plains City all married

*excepting the non-Assyrian wives or husbands.

non Assyrians.

The low rate of population increase from generation to generation indicates the considerable rate of out-migration from Plains City. Thirty individuals from the first generation and five from the second generation had left Plains City. Needless to say, most of these were married and had their own families. Incidentally, only four of these had Assyrian mates.

There is a difference for the reason behind the outmigration of the pioneers and subsequent generations. The pioneers moved out of Canada and joined other Assyrian communities in the United States, particularly California. But the emigration of the following generations illustrates the general Canadian pattern of migration from rural areas or small towns to larger industrial cities within Canada itself. In other words what motivated the pioneers to move was primarily kinship or ethnic ties; what motivated the following generations was primarily job opportunities (See Appendix D for a detailed diagram showing social structure and outmigration).

Social Structure

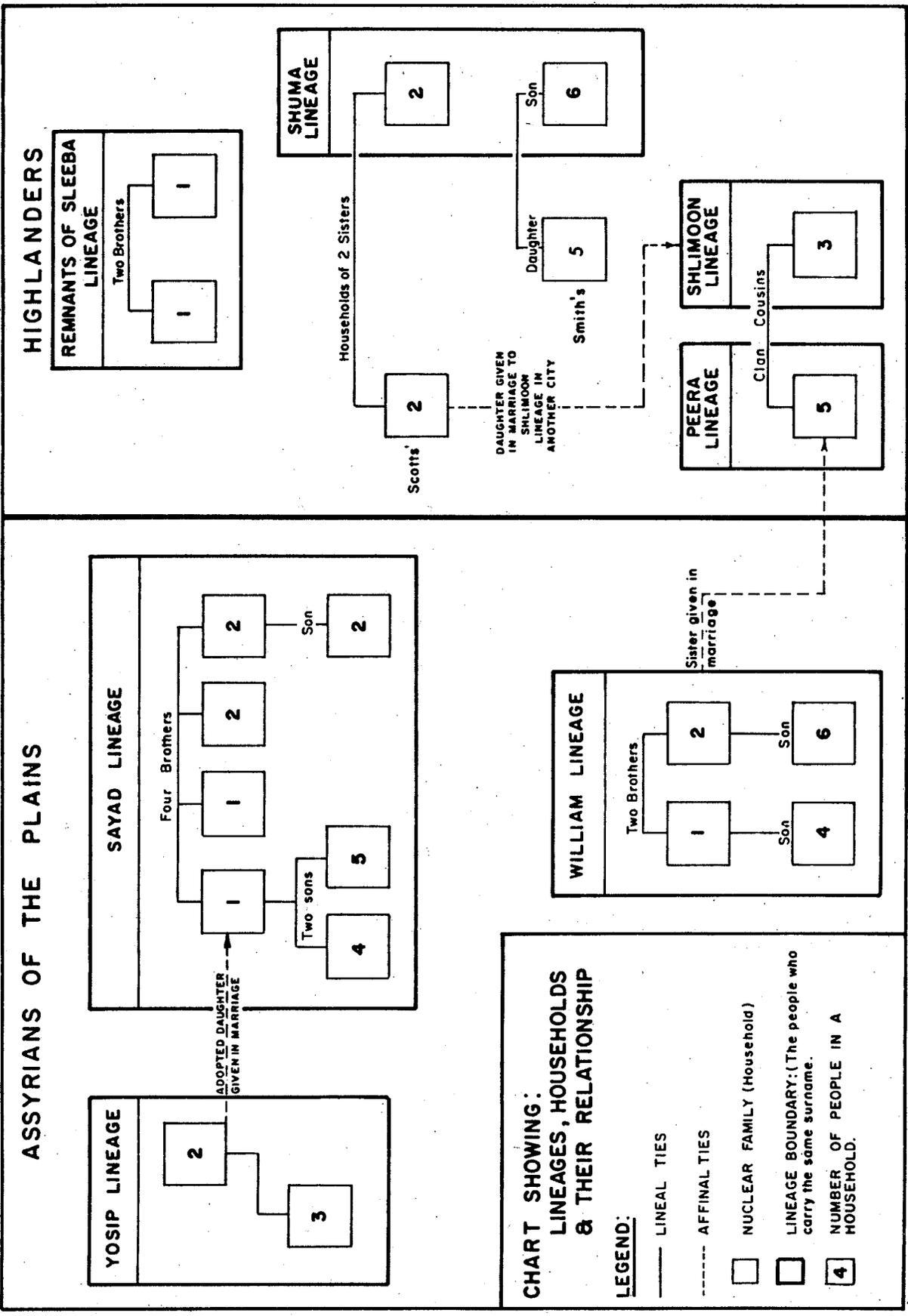
The total Assyrian population of the Plains City including the non-Assyrian wives and spouses at the time of research was fifty-nine. These constituted seven

"lineages"* or parts thereof (people who carried the same family name). Two of the families, the Scotts and the Smiths, were the families of women who had married non Assyrians. These "lineages" were divided into twenty-one households (nuclear families or remnants thereof living in separate dwellings). All these households were related to at least one other family in the community, either through lineal or affinal ties.

Remarkably enough, this was a miniature replica of the village social structure in the old country except that in this case the extended family did not live under one roof. The following diagram is a sketch of the community social structure. It illustrates the number of "lineages," the number of households, and how they are related. The diagram also represents the traditional division between the Highlanders and the Assyrians of the Plains. These divisions were still alive in the community. In the case of Mārtā, from the William lineage who married Peerā of Tyāri (refer to the diagram) relations between the in-laws had remained strained. Her close relatives looked upon her as a lost member of their family. Ironically, they would not have considered her "lost" if she

*Note that the word lineage does not imply a corporate unit here, it only refers to people who carry the same surname; the form of a lineage was present, but the function was not.

Chart III Kinship Relations between Assyrian Households in Plains City*



**CHART SHOWING:
LINEAGES, HOUSEHOLDS
& THEIR RELATIONSHIP**

LEGEND:

- LINEAL TIES
- - - AFFINAL TIES
- NUCLEAR FAMILY (Household)
- LINEAGE BOUNDARY: (The people who carry the same surname.)
- 4 NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN A HOUSEHOLD.

*Note: No hierarchical organization is implied in the position of lineages Vis a Vis each other.

had married a non-Assyrian. The highlanders were criticized for being "rough" and "crude." The two men from "Tyári" were really alone in Plains City because they were not even accepted by their own people. Peera's wife unequivocally supported the ideology of the Plains. Consequently the relation between Peera and his cousin had become strained too.

The nuclear type of family organization was later adopted in Canada. The nuclear family as a discreet residential group, and as a distinct property holding and decision making unit did not exist in the traditional Assyrian society. These functions were performed by the extended family. The pioneer settlers had transplanted the extended type of family organization and the patterns of mutual help and obligations that go with it to Canada. This proved very adaptive in view of their economic situation in a frontier environment. It helped the settlers to pull their resources together and minimize costs. It was mentioned earlier that during the first year the whole colony lived under one roof. The later settlers, too, were able to come to Canada because their relatives paid for their passage money. The common pattern for the newly arrived was, without exception, to stay with their relatives for a year or two until they could procure a house and become economically self-sufficient. Those who had no relatives in town, mostly

men, were given temporary accomodation for a year or two at the house of Ābūnā, the well to do farmer and businessman. All these men had shacks on their own lands, but the shacks had no heating facilities or water supply. So during the winter months the men stayed at the Abuna's. There were only two women in the house to feed the large crowd. Men helped with the heavier housework. Sometimes during the evenings and on the week-ends they recreated the life back home by singing Assyrian and Turkish songs and dancing to the rhythm of the drums and the music of "zoornā" (a type of bagpipe). As soon as these men were able to bring their families to Canada, they moved out and in turn helped other relatives to get established.

Occupations

By 1914 the majority of the Assyrian settlers had moved to Plains City where they occupied a quarter called "Chism Town" (the informants said the word "Chism" did not have any special meaning). Some kept their farms though, and commuted back and forth. In winter they stayed in town and kept their livestock (a few heads of cattle) in the backyard. Some worked as farm or town laborers. According to one informant, in 1912 digging ditches was ten hours work a day and paid \$1.25 per day. Some opened small business concerns such as a tannery, a tailor shop, a pool room, two grocery stores and a candy store. One worked as a painter, another as a buggy

driver, and another as a train conductor. One of these businesses (the poolroom) prospered and was perpetuated until the time of research but one of the grocery businesses went into bankruptcy. The others were sold as their owners moved out of Plains City or died.

In the 1930's the depression hit the Assyrian families to different extents. One farmer, George, said that the farmers did not suffer from hunger as there was enough to eat, but the only problem was the lack of cash. The provincial government paid the farmers \$7.50 a month when the crops failed; which they paid back in later years. Those who lived on a monthly salary were particularly hard hit. Unemployment prevailed. Those who had a job were paid excessively low salaries. In the case of one family of eight, the father Shuma, the (train conductor) died during the depression. The government refused to pay the mother relief money unless the eldest son, who was in Grade eight, was pulled out of school and put to cut grass for the City. In order to make the ends meet, one daughter had to find a job, and a room in the house had to be rented out. The wife of one of the Sāyād brothers whose husband had the poolroom said they did not suffer much because according to the old custom she used to store food supplies in the house, and when the depression hit, they had several sacks of

flour, sugar, jars of cheese, "tlūi,"* and other preserves in the house. The less fortunate Assyrians lived off the land, and in this respect they were more capable in finding food from the wild than some other people who were in the same predicament. They also hauled cut wood to town and sold it from door to door. Some earned their living through illegal channels and got in trouble with the law.

At the time of research certain types of occupations were found persisting in the community because they were perpetuated from generation to generation among the members of related families. In 1973 there were three farmers in the community. George and his eldest son owned their farms individually. They were among the most prominent farmers in the whole area both in terms of the amount of acreage of land and in terms of investment in machinery. They possessed the most modern farming equipment, which they owned jointly. The third farmer, Peerā, had "sold" his farm to one of his sons; but they still worked the land together. Peera also owned a poolroom, which, again, he had "sold" to his other two sons. Two of George's sons and one of his daughters were all lawyers, but none lived in Plains City at the time. The eldest Sayad brother had married Abuna's

*See p. 74 for a description:

widow in the 1920's and had inherited, according to the Assyrian cusotm, the poolroom and the candy store which he began to operate jointly with three of his brothers. Two brothers took responsibility for the poolroom and the other two for the candy store. At the time of research the poolroom was operated by one of Sayad's sons, but the candy store had been sold. Investing in real estate had also been practiced by the members of the colony. Af the time of research most of the retired individuals lived on the proceeds they received on rental houses they owned; the scale of such rentiers incomes ranged from only one house to two or three.

In 1973 there were three farmers; four individuals who owned businesses, (two poolrooms, a wholesaler, and a beauty salon owner and operator); seven individuals had specialized occupations and worked either for the government or private enterprises (road surveyer, hockey scout, railroad conductor, cook, small store manager, professional secretary and sales clerk).

With the closing down of surrounding small service towns, Plains City had expanded considerably the rural area it serviced, and had prospered correspondingly. In 1973 the municipal government was attempting to bring industry into the city in order to stabilize and diversify the economy.

Education

The majority of the 1902 and 1907 Assyrian settlers were illiterate in English and only a few could speak English. Back home, however, they spoke besides Assyrian, Turkish (the Azari dialect). Some also knew Kurdish or Armenian, or Persian. Those who came from towns had attended mission schools and could read and write Syriac. In view of the fact that "getting an education" was considered important in the scale of their traditional values, they all urged their children to attend school for as long as the family means would permit to keep the young people off the job market. This was because professional attainment had traditionally been an avenue for upward economic mobility for them. Some families endured considerable hardship to have their children sent to institutions of higher education outside of Plains City. In presenting figures for levels of education in the community only the first generation born in Canada are relevant. In the pioneer generation there were few youngsters to attend school, and those of the second generation were, at the time of research, either school age children or preschoolers and their future was yet unknown (except for five individuals who had reached the adult age).

The total number in the sample under consideration is forty-five (this figure includes the five members in

the second generation). Needless to say these are the offsprings of only those Assyrians who settled in Plains City permanently. From these forty-five individuals ten had a university degree; five of whom belonged to a single family; they were the sons and daughters of George the farmer. None of these ten individuals lived in Plains City at the time even though they were born and raised there. All lived in the larger cities of Eastern or Western Canada.

Five more of the forty-five had one or two years training beyond high school. Of these only two remained in Plains City.

Nineteen had finished high school. Of these only four lived in Plains City. The remaining eleven did not finish high school, and of these eight remained in town.

Although the rate of outmigration was heavy among all levels of education, the figures indicate that the tendency to leave Plains City was higher among the more educated individuals. The reason seemed to be that Plains City could not absorb all of its technically trained population since it was mainly a service center to the surrounding rural areas. Whether the very high proportion of first (plus five) generation Assyrians who sought education beyond Grade two is similar to the rest of the Plains City population of the 1930's and 1940's is not known. No information is easily available

at this time.

Marriage

It was not easy for the Assyrian settlers to find mates within their own group as the colony was small and isolated. The pioneer generation of settlers managed to find Assyrian mates. Some asked their relatives to bring them a wife from the old country. Others had to select a spouse which would be considered very "improper" in the old country. For instance in some cases marriage took place between first cousins (patrilateral) which is considered "too close." In one or two other cases men married widows who were much older than themselves. The marriages resulted in no offspring and were disapproved of from the very beginning. Some marriages were pre-arranged by parents and relatives according to the traditional custom. Some of the Assyrians in the pioneer generation had suggested to their sons and daughters to marry an Assyrian from the families they knew in the United States. But the Canadian born generation had found it impossible to marry someone they did not know. Intermarriage was well tolerated in the community as long as the marriage partner was Christian (except for the Indians with whom they did not associate and towards whom they had the typical White man's attitude).

Formal And Informal Organizations

The Assyrian settlers of Plains City did not

establish formal organizations such as a credit union, schools, clubs, or a church. This does not necessarily indicate weak social ties, since most of the functions performed by such organizations for settlers of other ethnic groups were fulfilled in the Assyrian community through kinship ties, according to the traditional patterns. Yet the lack of church does underwrite a serious deprivation since the church has always been the locus of Assyrian community life. The only time that the Assyrian settlers heard sermons in their own language was in 1928 when a visiting priest resided among the group for a year. These sermons were given every Sunday in a room in the building of the public library.

Informal social contact was extensive in the early days of settlement, but it gradually diminished through time. Until about 1942 there were weekly Sunday picnics in Summer, and weekend parties in Winter, in which virtually all the community participated. Even the children were brought along and put to bed at the residence of the host. Back in the old country such gatherings took place on the occasion of "Shahra," the village festival, where villages took turns in playing host to one another. But in Canada they were modified and stripped of their religious character. Christmas and Easter were celebrated according to the traditional pattern. On Good Friday all the community went to the

cemetery to visit the departed. Another occasion which set the stage for visiting and dinner parties was the arrival of visitors from out of town. This initiated rounds of dinner parties given by the relatives and friends of the family to whose house visitors had come.

The weekly Sunday picnics were gradually replaced by attending church regularly. At the time of research the majority belonged to the Presbyterian church and were devout and active members. The striking difference between the Assyrian Presbyterians of Plains City and other Assyrian Presbyterians is that the latter, in spite of their conversion, still retain the traditional rituals of the Church of the East, such as fasting, the offering of "dookhrana," and all the rest. But the Assyrians of Plains City are no different from other Western Presbyterians. Except for the pioneer generation, marriage, death, and other rites of passage are conducted according to North American customs by the following generations of Assyrians.

The week-end parties are not held any longer either. Christmas and Easter has become a family and not a communal affair. The lineage has lost its function as a corporate unit, and the nuclear family is predominantly the unit of solidarity. The rounds of parties for out of town visitors has also ceased. The considerable decrease in social contact was blamed by my informants on

different factors. Some attributed it to the television which, they believed, had taken the place of visiting as a form of recreation. Others blamed it on the financial prosperity of the community. As one informant put it, "Now they have acquired expensive furniture and do not like to see it trampled over by crowds of people and children." The basic reason seemed to be in the loss of social and economic interdependence which was caused during the depression and before that by the newness of the immigrants in the North American environment. Once the conditions for interdependence disappeared, sentiments gave way too. At the time of research only two events brought most of the Assyrians of Plains City together. Whenever there was a marriage or a death all the community participated.* Family ties on the nuclear level were strong. Widows, older people, and the sick were visited by their friends and relatives, and were tended to by their sons and daughters who felt duty bound to take care of their needs. The telephone was used frequently to pass around the news of happenings in the community. Visiting was still a symbol of

*I was invited to a wedding in which the partners to the marriage were a half-Assyrian, second generation woman, and a non-Assyrian man. Many of the pioneer and first generation Assyrians were present in the wedding party. These were obviously not the "friends" of the newly wed, but were invited because they were friends of the mother and the grand parents of the young woman.

friendship and respect, particularly among the older generation who began to complain and feel hurt if so-and-so had not been over to visit with them. The pioneer generation of settlers remained unchanged to a large extent in behavior and outlook. A first generation married Assyrian woman complained that the pioneer generation was "old fashioned": they still believed in prearranged marriage and held that women should marry at an early age, that parents came first in consideration even after the marriage of their sons and daughters. "Age" and "education" still conveyed higher status, however. For instance, the older generation thought it more proper if I (much younger than they) interviewed the elders first. It appeared that as long as the older generation of Assyrians were alive, some of the traditional village or interfamilial patterns of behavior and social relations would persist in the community.

One Assyrian trait seems to have a great chance to survive all changes; and that is Assyrian food. It is popular in every home, and even the non-Assyrian wives and husbands know how to prepare some of the dishes and prefer them to other conventional "Canadian" food. Tarragon, basil, coriander, and dill, which constitute important ingredients in Assyrian cooking are grown in the family vegetable gardens. The Canadian wife of one Assyrian referred to them as "grass" since it was hard

for her to distinguish between the different species of unfamiliar herbs. Some of the most popular dishes were: the two varieties of "dolmā," stuffed leaves of cabbage or grape vine; "jājik," cottage cheese mixed with finely chopped herbs; and "kādā" a pastry with unsweetened filling.

The Place Of Assyrian Settlers In A Frontier Town

The Assyrians of Plains City never attained a politically influential position in the social structure of the city, even though they were its first inhabitants. Not one Assyrian name appears in the list of local government representatives or prominent businessmen. They are essentially uninvolved members of the petty bourgeois and service working class, or young professionals who have moved elsewhere.

When the railraod reached the area in 1905, settlers of Anglo-Saxon origin from England or cities of Eastern Canada flowed into the settlement. They were of a variety of occupational backgrounds. Some were government agents or members of the Northwest Mounted Police who, after the termination of their service, decided to settle in the area. Later some of these held the municipal level of government posts. Others were prospectors or businessmen who took advantage of the opportunities offered by the increasing population of a boom town (Plains City had a population close to

6000 in 1913). Still others were farmers who settled in the area after the rail had reached it taking by homesteading control of the surrounding farmland. Later immigrants were mainly Ukrainian peasant farmers from Eastern Europe. But by far the city's most prominent investors, who can best be characterized as "absentee landlords," were the high officialdom of the Canadian Northern Railway Company.

The Assyrian settlers were handicapped in two ways. They were illiterate in English and some hardly spoke the language; and they had no business experience or contacts. On the other hand, they were not "peasants" in the full sense of the word. They had had experience with urban life and urban types of occupations. Some were even skilled artisans. But in Plains City they had to start nearly at the bottom of the economic scale and had no access except through technical or professional education to upper middle class levels. The peasant immigrants from Persia and Eastern European countries were brought to Canada for the purpose of producing grain for the British market, their production to be controlled by the railroad interests (via transportation to market). Having failed as farmers, they were not welcomed on the urban job market as competitors of the "White Man." Like the Japanese and Chinese who were mainly imported to do heavy manual labor for the construction of the

railways and cities, they were given unskilled jobs and were kept unskilled. Their isolation near the bottom of the class system was justified by rationalizing that these people were an "inferior" brand of human beings.

J. Woodsworth exemplifies that outlook, quoting "authorities" on Syrians, Armenians, and settlers from Persia (with specific reference to Assyrians) to the effect that "their intellectual level is low." He further characterizes them by such unflattering epithets as "deceitful," "parasites from the East," and finally concludes that they are the most "undesirable" immigrant group (Woodsworth 1911:167-169).*

At the time of research one informant reported that although he was welcomed in well reputed social clubs, and was on the executive committee of an international labor union, yet for thirty years he had held the same position in his job. He also disclosed that he would not have had this job to start with were it not for the help of a British settler.

The early Assyrian settlers soon became aware that their ethnic identity was a stigma in the new environment. Some of the informants said when they were school age children, they were often teased and referred to as "black Persians" by their classmates. To escape the

*Rev. J. Woodsworth was the superintendent of the Methodist Missions in Western Canada (1887-1915).

stigma, the Assyrian settlers tried to wipe out all the overt signs of their ethnicity. Names were anglicized. When a European neighbor knocked at their door, they hid the native food away so as not to offend the Western sensitivities. Some Assyrian school children ate their lunches prepared at home away from other children because they were "different," and this was embarrassing. English was preferred to the Assyrian language. The fact that the Assyrian settlers had to articulate with the larger society in terms of the institutions of the dominant group, made their cultural traditions irrelevant. These were relegated to the occasions when one Assyrian confronted another Assyrian. The first generation of Assyrians who were born in Plains City found themselves in a rather difficult position. They could neither identify with the traditions of their parents because they were irrelevant and a handicap, nor were they accepted as full-fledged members of the dominant society. (See Appendix E for an account of experiences of a first generation Assyrian born in Canada).

At the time of research the Assyrians of Plains City did not publicize their identity to outsiders. Several Canadians in the city expressed total ignorance of the existence of an Assyrian community amongst them. The Canadian wives and husbands of the Assyrians said that they would not have known of the Assyrian community

in town if it were not for their marriage with one. The Ukrainian wife of one Assyrian said that her parents thought she was marrying a Turk and therefore were against the marriage.

The names of the Assyrians were anglicized beyond recognition. Everyone preferred to use English at all times. Even the older generation of settlers kept shifting from Assyrian to English. Almost all of the first generation Assyrians understood Assyrian, but spoke English. Remaining incognito seemed to be deliberate. One informant believed that if a person wanted to get a job in line with his competence he should not reveal his ethnic identity.

With respect to neighbors and friends, the informants maintained that Canadians make friendly neighbors and good friends. Some even preferred them to "their own people." With the stress on Canadian "multiculturalism" in schools in recent years, students are encouraged to display their ethnic characteristics. A few children went to "grandma" to learn the Syriac alphabet. One child had recited the Lord's prayer in Assyrian during the Christmas program at school and was praised for that.

But there was no sense of national pride in the community. Only in two families were there pictures of Assyrian national heroes, and these were pioneer

settlers. There were no Assyrian magazines in their homes (except one in one house) and there was little awareness of what was happening in the Assyrian world outside. Only Peera had returned for a visit to the old country. In sum this was a community that as a Canadian wife of an Assyrian put it, "got lost."

Although the general history of this colony suggests a steady process toward complete ethnic dissolution, closer analysis shows that the dispersion of the members from this small colony in Western Canada was to some extent, nevertheless, directed towards reunion with other more flourishing Assyrian colonies in North America so that the net effect of this dispersion has not been a total population loss to the Assyrian community at large.

Conclusion

As the experience of the Assyrians of Plains City indicates, their migration from the pre-industrial Middle Eastern states to a Western capitalist state did not change their status as a marginal ethnic group. In both systems they occupied the lower levels of socio-economic strata. The subsistence economy of a peasant adaptation in the Middle East kept the village community as a social isolate and helped the maintenance of ethnic identity. But the cash oriented market economy of North America fragmented the community into small independent economic units. This led to geographical dispersion

and economic differentiation. Thus the basis for maintaining ethnic identity was broken down. The government's policy to promote "multi culturalism" came too late for the Assyrian colony in Plains City. When the few remaining old pioneers pass away, there will be little left in the community to be called "Assyrian."

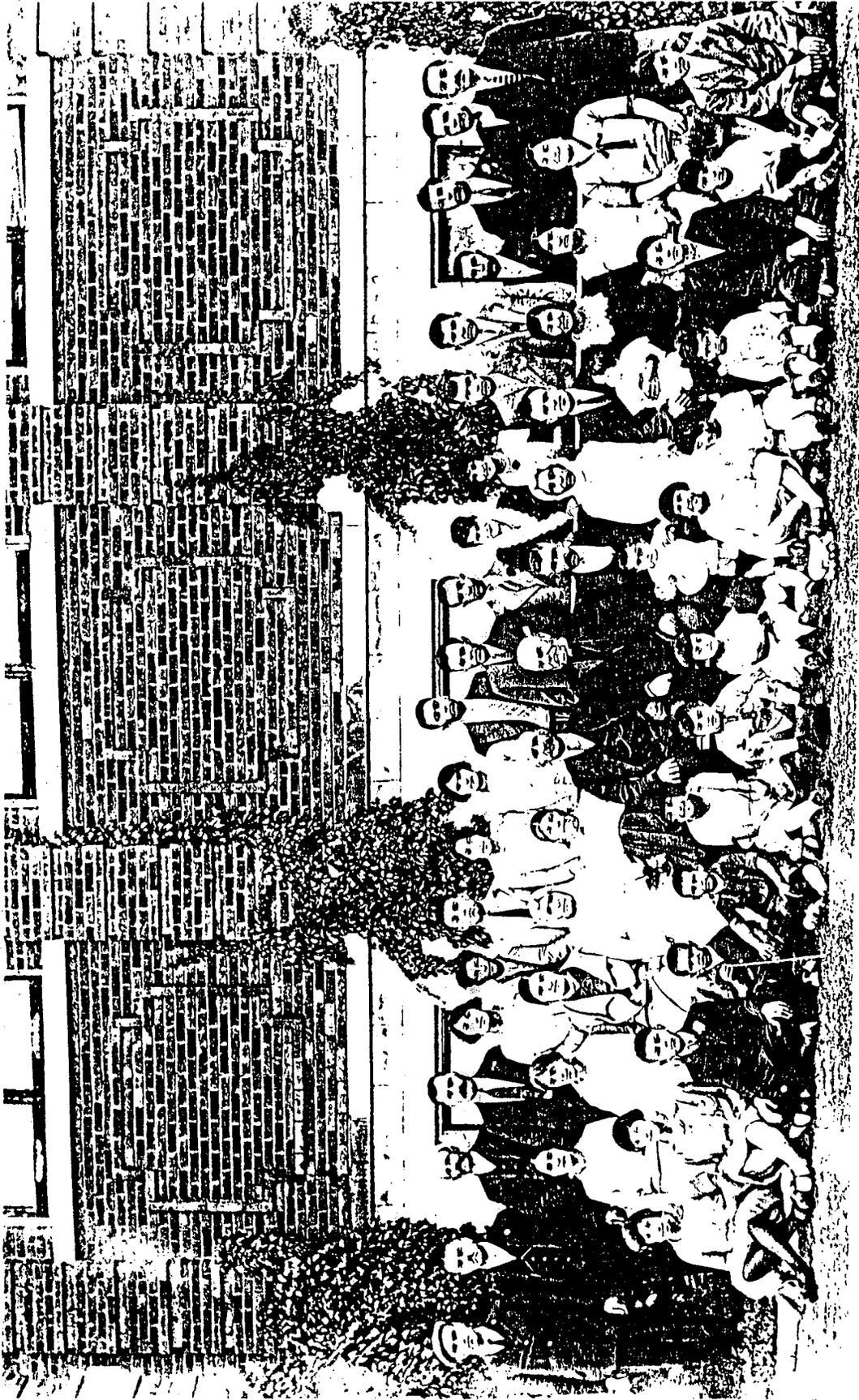


Fig. XVI. Plains City: Assyrians with the visiting priest after a Sunday Sermon:1928.

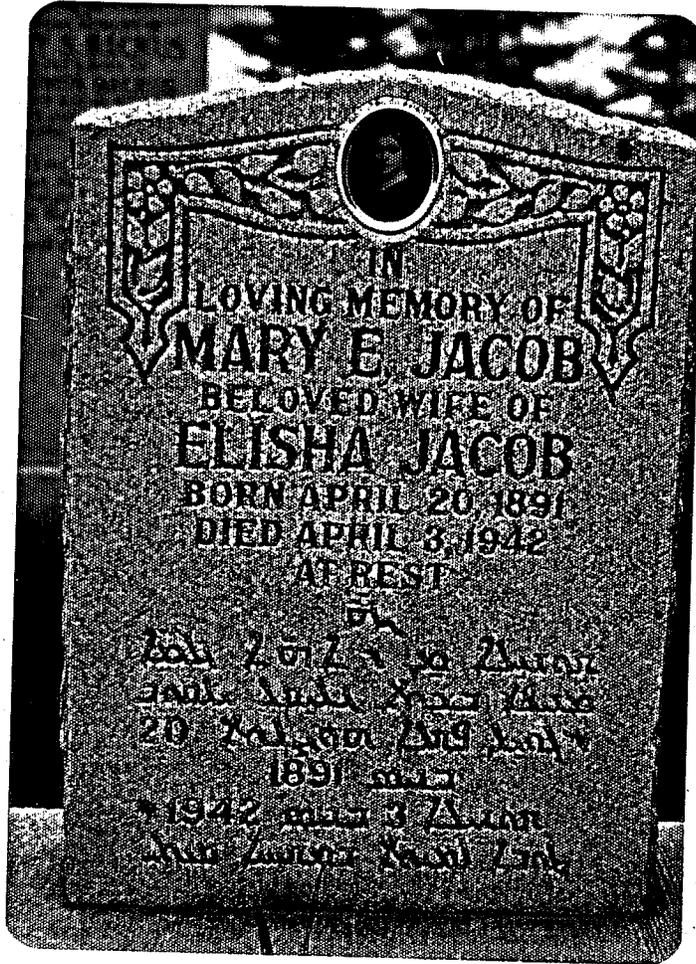


Fig. XVII. One of the tombstones with Syriac inscriptions: Plains City.

CHAPTER VIII

ASSYRIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

General Description

The migration of Assyrians to United States reached a momentum immediately following World War I (See Chapter VI). The immigrants entered in the country through New York; many settled in New York city or in New Jersey and Connecticut. Others settled further West in Chicago (Yonan 1962:29-30). Ever since, the flow of Assyrian immigrants to that country has been continuous. In 1942 there were only between ten to twelve thousand Assyrians in the United States; in 1972 the Assyrian population of Chicago alone was about 20,000. After Chicago, California (San Joaquin Valley, San Francisco, Los Angeles); Philadelphia, New York (Metropolitan and environs); Michigan (Detroit, Flint); and Connecticut (New Britain and adjacent towns) have the largest numbers of Assyrian settlers. The population distribution indicates regional or even village clustering. For instance the Assyrian Jacobites are found predominantly in New York; "Chaldeans" in Michigan; and Assyrians from the village of Gogtapa and Taka-Ardishay in Connecticut.

Occupations

The majority of Assyrian immigrants settled in the larger industrial cities of Eastern United States and worked as laborers. Many were employed in the auto

industry. Those who had specialized occupations back home found jobs in line with their experience. In the 1960's there were still Assyrians working as bricklayers, carpenters, tailors, and farmers (Yonan 1962:31). Some of those who did not have a special skill entered the restaurant business, or real estate sales or hotel services. Some worked as pedlars. The pioneer Assyrian immigrants were often treated little better than the Negroes. But they were thankful and happy with their lot because money was easy to come by in America if one worked hard enough, and there was no danger of massacre. The first generation of Assyrians born in America did economically better than their parents because they had a chance to attend school and some finished high school and found clerical type jobs. The second generation did even better. A good number attended college and graduated with a degree. In the 1970's there were between forty to fifty Assyrian professionals in the medical and dental sciences alone in Chicago.

At present there are no Assyrians in the federal agencies of government; but there are a number of prominent Assyrians in State Governments. All in all the American Assyrians constitute, economically, the most prosperous sector of the Assyrian nation.

National Reunification and Leadership

With the exodus of Assyrian national leaders from the Middle East, the Assyrian leadership was transferred

to United States and France. The feelings of nationalism were high among the ethnic minorities in the Islamic States of Persia and Ottoman Turkey at the end of nineteenth century, as a result of contact with the Western thought. Such feelings were further fanned by the European powers for their own interests.

The Assyrians of Ottoman Turkey, known as Jacobites, and of Persia (Nestorians) saw the birth of national figures such as Freydoon Atourāyā (1870's-1920) of Persia; Senharib Bālle (1878-1971) and Naoum Fāik (1868-1930) both of Turkey (Daniel 1969:33). Some of the Assyrian priesthood who attained prominence as Eastern scholars, such as Mar Tuma Odu (?-1918) and Yosip bet Kāletē (1800-1955), showed national awareness in their writings. Assyrian newspapers were published both in Turkey and Persia at the turn of the century. The first nationalist convention of all Assyrians in Turkey took place in 1908. But the Assyrians of Turkey and Persia had taken different paths centuries ago when the Persian "Nestorians" broke off all ties from their brothers in Eastern Anatolia and Syria. During the end of nineteenth century they had almost no contact with each other and were little aware of one another's national activities. But in the United States they were brought together face to face in one locality and a remarkable event took place. After centuries of separation for religious reasons, the

Jacobite and the Nestorian Assyrians reunited on national grounds. The result was the establishment of the Assyrian National Association in 1915. Although the Assyrian American national leaders were self-appointed, yet they were instrumental in rousing national feelings among the Assyrians by advocating ethnic unity in favor of religious factionalism. No less than three newspapers were published in the United States. Senharib Balley started the Voice of Assyria in 1914; Mr. Naoum Faiq published The Eurito ("Wake Up") which was later called Bet Nairan (Assyrian Star 1972:5). Youel Warda (Assyrian from Persia) published Gālā-d-Shrārā ("Voice of Truth"). The American Assyrians were also instrumental in supporting the war ravaged Assyrians in the Middle East through money remittances. This was done both on an individual family basis to specific relatives and through contribution on a national scale via the Assyrian organizations.

The creation of the Assyrian National Organization and later the establishment of the Assyrian American Federation in 1933, as a result of atrocities in Iraq towards the Assyrian minority, signified that the traditional leadership through the Patriarch was being supplemented by a secular form of leadership. However, loyalty to the Patriarch remained strong among the majority of Assyrians everywhere until 1973 when Mar Eshai Shimun, who after his exile from Iraq had settled in the United states, resigned his post.

Formal Organizations

At present the Assyrian American Federation has about forty-two affiliate associations and organizations throughout the United States and Canada. Annual conventions are held alternately in different States, and they draw large numbers of Assyrians from all over North America. The Federation publishes a monthly English-Assyrian magazine titled the Assyrian Star. Other better known Assyrian periodicals in that country are Bet Nahrain and Quest. Assyrian Voice is also broadcast on radio programs in the State of California and in Chicago. Besides, there are several independent sports or social organizations run by different interest groups.

Church

The Assyrian church, irrespective of denominational differences, has retained its traditional role as the locus of Assyrian community activities. Social functions sponsored by the local church are always popular, and all Assyrians attend the picnics, plays, and parties sponsored by the church irrespective of denominational differences. In the Church of the East mass and other church services are performed in the traditional pattern. Many of the ancient rituals have survived in a somewhat modified form. For instance Saint's days are celebrated and the "Shara" festivity is performed as a picnic day sponsored by the church. Many Assyrian Americans still write and ask their

relatives in Middle East to take a "Doukhrana" to the ancient shrines on their behalf.

Cultural Change and Structural Continuity

The Assyrian Americans are in many ways different from those of a century ago. They dress and behave differently, and the majority live in urban centers and are involved in urban occupations. Many speak English and even their names are anglicized. They have less social contact with each other, and prefer American type of entertainment to the traditional social visiting. Yet in spite of significant cultural changes, the basis upon which Assyrian communities structure their relations vis a vis each other has not changed. In spite of the efforts of national minded Assyrians, the sectarian divisions along denominational and traditional peasant and mountaineer subcultures persist in North America. To these are added a new element of division: identification in terms of country of origin which seems to set the Assyrian immigrants from Iran apart from those from Iraq. This was observed when I stayed in Los Angeles and Turlock in the spring of 1975 to participate in the annual Assyrian State Convention of Southern California. A few Persian Assyrians referred to the Assyrians of Iraq by the term "Arabs," clearly displaying the Persian antipathy towards Arabs. However, Assyrians from both countries participated in the social functions sponsored by the Assyrian American

Civic Club In Turlock. During the evening parties the orchestra, entirely Assyrian, performed in English, Assyrian, and Persian. Assyrian Iraqi singers were invited to sing their songs and some did. One evening it was announced that "Wardiya" an Iraqi Assyrian singer, was present. The whole crowd stood up to cheer Wardiya, an amateur, but very talented singer. She symbolized a favorite national character and during her performance all forgot their differences.

Kinship, village and regional ties were maintained in the immigrant community itself and between it and the home community. Obviously the flow of immigrants reinforced ethnic and kinship ties and helped perpetuate some of the interfamilial and village patterns of action. The modern means of communication helped the immigrant community maintain contact with the home community through mail, telephone, and occasional visits. But almost all the flow of immigration was one way, toward permanent settlement in North America. The available data on marriage patterns indicate that Assyrians still marry largely within their own group (Aswad 1974:30; Yonan 1962:58). Yet there is a serious apprehension among some of the Assyrians that in a generation or two they will all be assimilated within the North American culture. Undoubtedly the rate of cultural change among the immigrant population is considerable simply because many of the cultural features associated

with village life become irrelevant in an urban setting. Yet to what extent such changes are conducive to "loss of identity" is questionable. Actually in the United States, perhaps more than anywhere else, Assyrian national consciousness finds expression. This is basically due to the active policy of the North American governments to promote "multi-culturalism" or "pluralism": a new version of the old age divide and rule policy. (See Cunningham 1975-1976:415-416). The promotion of ethnic solidarity not only diverts the attention of emigrant groups from domestic national issues, and keeps them preoccupied with their own affairs, but also it makes the emigrant as well as the "parent" community easy targets for political manipulation and exploitation in international politics.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Minority groups are a product of state systems. Primitive society has neither classes nor minorities. (See Fried 1967). Initially the state comes to contain a multiplicity of ethnic groups through conquest. The fact that vanquished populations are not exterminated or driven away from the state boundaries is due to their use value as tax payers. Various policies are adopted by the ruling class of the state to keep such ethnic groups economically and politically subordinate. The policy of organizing minorities into millets which was adopted by the pre-industrial states of the Middle East, and the promotion of multi-culturalism adopted by Western capitalist or quasi-socialist states in modern times, are variants of the age old divide and rule policy. Minority groups, on the other hand, devise their own policies to overcome the economic and social disadvantages imposed upon them by the state. Historically such policies have manifested themselves in the attempt of the minority groups to find an avenue for social and economic mobility within the state system itself, as manifested in the specialization of the Assyrians in technical or professional occupations, or through the subversive policy of overthrowing the ruling class by

cooperating with its enemies. The history of the Assyrian people illustrates the tensions created by the ruling classes of a state in their attempt to monopolize the prerogatives of wealth and power, and the struggle of the minorities to defend their material and human resources against exploitation. Further, the history of the Assyrian minority points to a progressive decrease in its ability to preserve its resources. The trend towards disintegration has accelerated in the recent decade ever since power politics were introduced in the Middle East on an intensive and international scale. The upheavals of World War I undermined the very basis of Assyrian ethnic solidarity and distinctiveness. The major losses can be summarized as follows: there is first the considerable rate of territorial dislocation and world wide dispersion. With the loss of their mountain strongholds in Hakkiari, the Assyrians lost the very nucleus of their entity. It was there where Assyrian language, traditions, and human resources were preserved and supplied to the surrounding plains. The relation of the Hakkiari Assyrians to the rest of the population which was distributed in the surrounding plains was very much like the relation of streams to their source.

Of no less importance was the loss of traditional political leadership in the position of the Assyrian

Patriarch after World War I which closed off the community and gave it its own internal structure and autonomy.

A third divisive element has been the loss of linguistic unity. Scattered as they are among different nation states, the younger generation of Assyrians soon abandon the mother tongue in favor of the national language of the country in which they are raised. This is directly related to the fact that traditional peasant organization with its economic self sufficiency and isolation has been undermined. At present the majority of Assyrians are integrated within national economies where they have to deal with the institutions and culture of the dominant society. Even the Assyrian peasant communities in Syria, northern Iraq, and Northwestern Persia are not economically viable. They subsist largely on the cash earned through labor migration. The villages of Northwestern Iran have become drastically depleted from their Assyrian population, and even the villagers who remain, migrate seasonally to town, indicating clearly a transitional stage within a process leading to complete urbanization; since the children of such families attend school and are not being raised to become peasant farmers.

Having lost the traditional basis of their solidarity, the Assyrians have attempted to reorganize and

reunite on secular grounds by establishing formal organizations which promote national unity and strive to keep the mother tongue and ancestral customs alive. The degree of their success has been variable and has depended on the policy of the states where the Assyrians are found. Communist Russia and Western capitalist states promote multiculturalism where it suits their purposes. The Assyrians inhabiting European countries (England, France, Germany); North America (United States and Canada); Australia, and U.S.S.R. have established various societies and associations which bring the Assyrians together to maintain their ethnic ties. In each of these countries at least one Assyrian periodical or newsletter is published. On the other hand, the Assyrians inhabiting Middle Eastern countries have not all enjoyed such privileges. The states in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey are intent upon promoting national homogeneity, and suppress the expression of ethnic divergence within their boundaries. The Assyrians of Syria and Turkey seem to be completely integrated within the national state system in so far as they do not have separate social clubs or schools. It seems that fear from the government is so strong that the Assyrians in these countries are apprehensive of even establishing a cultural center where the mother tongue can be taught to the children (Sarmas 1972:9-10). The Hakkliari Assyrians in Syria and

Northern Iraq remain the least "changed" in terms of the traditional patterns of social organization and cultural traits. The reason is that they have no place in the national political and economic mainstream and form a cheap labor reserve force. "Martha" (Peera's wife) who had visited the Assyrian camps in Syria commented on their poverty and blamed it on their "laziness." "They do not even grow a vegetable garden in their yards." she remarked disdainfully. Yet a generation or two ago these same people were intensive terrace cultivators.

The Iraqi government has made gestures of granting the Assyrians some of their cultural rights. But the Assyrian nationalist element has been asking the government of Iraq more than it is willing to grant. The Assyrians and the Kurds of Northern Iraq have claimed their territorial rights in the area, and a measure of internal autonomy. To what extent the government of Iraq is prepared to accommodate Kurdish and Assyrian claims is evident in its recent policy which is to "Arabize" Northern Iraq by installing large numbers of Arab peasant communities imported from Egypt (Assyrian Star 1975:4:3). The government's policy to "homogenize" the population in the country goes a long way to explain the exodus of Assyrians from Iraq in ever larger numbers and their migration primarily to the United States and Australia.

In Iran the age old millet system has been retained and secularized to suit the modern structure of the Iranian political system. The Christian minorities in that country are represented by a member in the parliament. They have the right to establish schools and social or cultural societies of their own.

The struggle for survival of the minority groups in the Middle East be it Christian, Palestenian, Kurd, or Druze is threatened by the rivalry of the Middle Eastern nation states and their industrial allies over political and economic supremacy in the area. The use of minority groups as "cannon fodder" in this rivalry is noteworthy. Western intervention in the affairs of Middle Eastern countries through the old tactics of instigating the minority groups against the central power has not ceased, and the vested interests of the local dominant group motivates such groups to solve the problem of their minorities through coercion rather than through equitable adjustment. This gives the Western powers the opportunity to successfully take advantage of the grievances of the oppressed groups in these countries. A recent example of this type of manipulation was the Kurdo-Iraqi war in Northern Iraq in the early years of 1970. The unrest was reportedly staged by C.I.A. (The Calgary Herald 1975: Nov. 3:6). Evidently the Kurds or the Assyrians of northern Iraq did not need much instigation to air their

long seated grievances which have persisted ever since the map of the Middle East was redrawn without consideration to local historical traditions in the government of these areas and the ethnic divisions. That Atour, the official publication of the Assyrian Iranian Federation, supported the cause of Kurds and Assyrians was not so much a symptom of Assyrian national unity as it was a Persian anti-Iraq propaganda device implemented through the editor of Atour, the then Assyrian representative in the Parliament (The Assyrian Star 1975:2:6). Actually considerable numbers of Assyrians everywhere resented the sloganeering articles accompanied by unflattering remarks towards the "Baath" government of Iraq. They questioned the wisdom of antagonizing a country in which large numbers of Assyrians still make a living.

The rapid rate of cultural and linguistic assimilation has made many national minded Assyrians convinced that without a homeland where the Assyrians can form a nucleus and live in proximity, establish schools and perpetuate their traditions, the nation is doomed to extinction. The organization of the Assyrian Universal Alliance to claim, through the United Nations, the territorial and political rights which were denied the Assyrians after World War I, has been the result of such concern on the part of Assyrian nationalists.



Fig. XVIII. Hakkiari Assyrians: in traditional and not so traditional costume. Syria: 1970's.



Fig. XIX. An Assyrian settlement on the Khabour, Syria (1970's).

APPENDIX A

KEY TO THE PRONUNCIATION OF RECURRENT
SOUNDS IN SYRIAC

ā as in father, art.

ā̇ as in add, fat.

e as in set, bet.

ē as in eat, read.

i as in hit, sit.

ī as in police, greet.

o as in boat, coat.

ū as in rule, true.

APPENDIX B

THE REPORT OF COLONEL J. J. McCARTHY¹

It was either before or shortly after leaving Baghdad en route for Persia /that/ General Dunsterville got in communication with the Assyrians at Lake Urmia with the idea of getting them to join force with us against the Turk. This they willingly agreed to do provided we sent British officers to lead them, as they did not at that stage trust the Russians they had with them.

It was decided to send a force of 75 British officers and N. C. O.'s to Lake Urmia and I was appointed to command this special mission.

About this time Flying Officer Captain Pennington flew to Lake Urmia with despatches from our Headquarters at Hamadan. I did not see these despatches but I was well aware that they contained confirmation of what had already been written and to advise the Assyrians of our coming to join them. Seeing the aeroplane arrive and receiving the news that a British force was in Persia and on the way to join them, no doubt gave the Assyrians an exaggerated idea of our strength in Persia, and a false idea of their own security. Had they not depended so entirely on the assistance that they were to receive from us and had Agha Petros not taken practically the whole of his armed force to take over arms and ammunition sent on in advance by us, the

Assyrians would have looked more to their own resources and would not have depended so much on our help.

They more than held their own in many engagements against the Turks; they had food and by nursing their ammunition they could have held out against any likely attack from the Turk, who was not exactly full of fight at that stage and very soon after went out of the War altogether. Even if the worst happened and they had been driven out of there by an overwhelming force, which was not at all likely at the time, they could have fallen back on their mountain stronghold and probably got in touch with British troops on the Mosul side; they were certainly not driven out by a superior force, but stampeded by false reports circulated by the enemy, and thinking that Agha Petros had deserted them at Urmia. I am sure the stampede would never have taken place, but it must be remembered that we were a small force, living on the country and General Dunsterville had his hands full at the time preparing his landing at Baku. His officers were employed on various jobs and could not be recalled at the moment's notice. There were two groups of Persian levies which used up a considerable number of officers and N. C. O.'s and our lines of communication extending from Baghdad to the Caspian Sea accounted for a great many more.

We had to rely mostly on local contractors (thoroughly dishonest and unreliable) for our transport,

so that the officers for the Special Mission I was to command were not available at a moment's notice, more especially as they had to be volunteers and specially selected.

When it was known that the whole nation was in retreat, I went at once with a portion of my force with the idea of turning back the fighting men and allowing the families to continue to Hamadan, and met them retreating on a wide front, the families on the main road, the men extended for miles on either side of the road covering the retreat. It was therefore quite impossible to get in touch at all with the bulk of the fighting men, being confined as I was to the main road.

Apart from being harassed by the enemy every known disease seemed to attack these unfortunate people, and hundreds died from typhus, dysentery and small-pox, and others from exhaustion. It was a common thing to see children, still alive, abandoned on the roadside, the parents probably dead. Wherever they camped for the night the ground next morning was littered with dead and dying. What these unfortunate people suffered few can realize. Some 10,000 were cut off by the Turks, and so far as I know have never been seen again.

Eventually what was left of the Nation arrived at Hamadan. All those I met in the retreat had one idea, and one idea only, and that was they were going to Hamadan

where they would join up with ā/British force promised them and return at once, drive out the Turk, and reoccupy their country.

This is precisely what they all had in their minds.

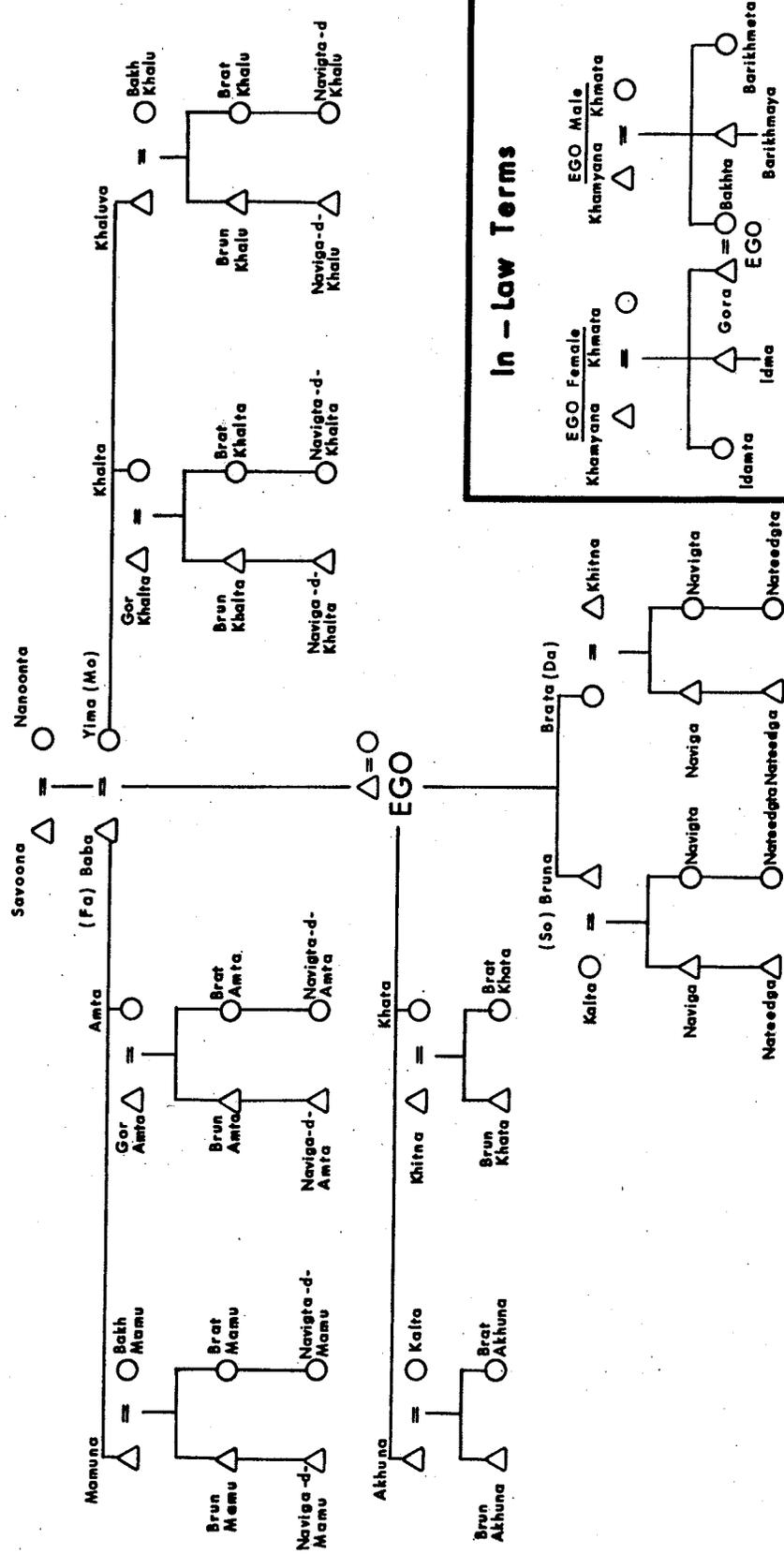
A few weeks later when I was raising the Assyrian contingent, with the help of Lady Surma, the men all thought they were returning home at once. Not only did they themselves think so, but they were definitely told by me that they would be taken back under British officers and that I was to command them. Surely there cannot be any doubt, and I am sure that nobody holding any responsible post and on the spot at the time would dispute the fact that this is what was intended when the fighting men were formed into a contingent, placed in a separate camp outside Hamadan where they underwent strenuous training under British officers, and were fed, and to a certain extent clothed by us.

I sent an officer to Teheran to buy rifles and ammunition which had been sold in the bazaars by the Russian troops. All this was not done and these men were not being trained for the defence of Persia!

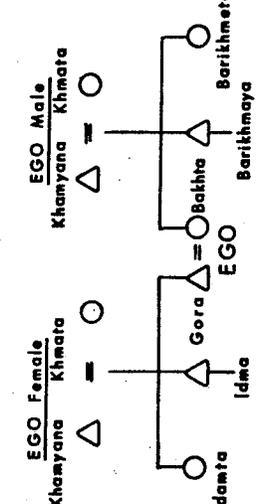
Again when it was decided to march the contingent down to Mesopotamia the men were told by me that it was only to have them properly trained and equipped, and to be armed with all British rifles instead of the various pattern rifles they had, and which would have made it

impossible to keep them supplied with ammunition, should they meet with armed resistance when returning to their homes or after they got there....

Assyrian Kinship Terminology



In-Law Terms



APPENDIX : C

APPENDIX E

IT ISN'T EASY TO BE AN ASSYRIAN

It isn't easy to be an Assyrian. It isn't easy at all. It's even more difficult growing up part Anglo-Saxon, part Assyrian in a small Canadian town. You listen to the oriental music your aunt plays on an ancient record player.

To your seven year old ears, it's just a plaintive wail, not real music, at least not the kind of music that your mother plays at home when she turns on the radio, and it's not the kind of music you hear at school, but you've been told that this music is part of your heritage by your father.

What ever that means. The music brings a tear to your father's eye...your father, his brother and sisters often sit and drink tea out of tall glasses, while they listen to this music and cry.

It must be the words of the songs; perhaps they are lonesome for their homeland,... - nevertheless, you can't share their sorrow. You gaze at the Persian carpets on the walls in the home of relatives. The palm trees and camels and desert scenes they have woven into them make you think.

Who are these people? Where did they come from? Why did they come here? To a small town on the Canadian

prairies. They look different than the townspeople. Their skin is a bit darker, their eyes are various shades of brown, ranging on black almost; their hair is the same.

You look at your aunt Sarah's hair; a beautiful shade of blue-black, and you wish that you had hair like hers. Yours is more of a brown-black, but it's O.K. since it matches your eyes...

Some of your cousins are talking about nose-jobs. You look at your nose, it's small and slightly turned up at the end. Perhaps because of the Irish and Scottish blood running in your veins...anyway you won't need plastic surgery when you grow up...if that ever happens ...and you aren't in any particular hurry...because life is full of little joys on the inside of an Assyrian community (the parties and Assyrian food) and that joy helps to soothe the sting of the occasional stab of pain you feel when you are outside of the community.

The pain of knowing that you look different and are different than the other people in town; the pain of having someone tell you that you are different.

You don't realize it now, because you're too young but the hurt you have been made to feel is called prejudice in the English language.

Prejudice: an ugly word in any language. Two incidents stand out in your mind: The teacher at school

who tells you that your skin is "tan all year around."

What's so bad about having tan skin, you wonder, when all of your blond and red-headed friends are forever putting suntan lotion on their skin and lying in the sun to get a tan like yours? And in spite of their efforts, some of them only manage to get a bad burn or freckle.

The other incident happens in a local cafe: You're sipping a soda with your cousin, Margaret, when the boy who has been eyeing you from a nearby booth comes over and asks your cousin for an introduction to her "friend." She tells him that you are not her "friend," you are her cousin. He laughs, suddenly losing interest, and remarks as he walks away, "Nice looking kid, for an Assyrian."

The boy is 16 or 17. You are 14. He has blue eyes and is French-Canadian. You walk home, look into your mirror and say to yourself: "What's wrong with me?" "Nothing," you tell the reflection in the mirror...You try not to hate them...the "ignorant boy" and the "stupid teacher" but you do.

"And that's the trouble with prejudice, it turns its victims into haters. Line up the two teams, whose gonna tell them apart."

Television writer, Rod Sterling once wrote this. Nope, it isn't easy to be an Assyrian growing up in a small town. (This article was written by Jean Okkerse from Plains City, Canada).

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