MODERN ASSYRIAN IDENTITY AND THE CHURCH OF THE EAST:
AN EXPLORATION OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP AND THE RISE OF ASSYRIAN
NATIONALISM, FROM THE WORLD WARS TO 1980

by

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Modern Assyrian Identity and the Church of the East:
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At the beginning of the twentieth century, the boundaries of the modern Assyrian community were determined primarily by religious adherence, that is, affiliation with the Church of the East, sometimes called the “Nestorian” Church. But experiences and changes in orientation undergone by the Assyrians during the twentieth century—including encounters with other manifestations of nationalism, the coming together of Assyrians across regional divides and of Syriac-speakers of all denominations, and the rise of an active Assyrian diaspora—worked to promote a shift in Assyrian communal self-conception that emphasized the “ethnic” qualities of language and ancestry, rather than religious adherence. Nevertheless, the Church of the East continued to play an important role in the new secularized Assyrian identity, one that both made it a natural “ally” of the nationalist movement and also a stumbling block to the realization of nationalistic goals.
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Introduction

The elements at the root of human identities and the processes by which they combine and configure are complex and diverse. These elements may include particulars such as language, culture, perceived ethnicity or blood ancestry, religion, and common myths and historical memories. The constellations into which these elements are grouped by human collectives may incorporate some or all of them, each with a different degree of emphasis, in connections that form a "whole", thereby determining the parameters of a community's identity. Not only are the elements that comprise an identity varied, but the configurations within an identity may also change over time --including new elements, discarding others, or simply shifting the "hierarchy" of existing elements-- , showing identities themselves to be variable from age to age, despite their appearance of rigidity or immutability. Moreover, with the rise of nationalism as an ideology and its dissemination as a low-level mass consciousness, many communal identities have mutated in order to meet the requirements of a national identity, though maintaining and usually being dependent upon established and recognized elements of pre-existing identities. In fact, national identities have capitalized upon their use of communal “touchstones” to promote their image as the “true” articulations of communal identities and as having old, even ancient, pedigrees. This type of nationalistic transformation of previous self-understandings has occurred with countless communities, including in the identity of the modern Assyrians, the people at the centre of this paper.

The Assyrians are an indigenous community to the Middle East, whose homelands have been traditionally centred in the region of Mesopotamia (between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, now largely contained in the modern state of Iraq) and extended into present-day southeastern Turkey and western Iran. The Assyrian community was a Christian minority that received a great deal of attention from the Western powers during the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and so were included in the Western records of that period), but that then seemed to fade from view. The gradual “disappearance” of the Assyrian people was due to the changing interests of the Western powers in the Middle East, who initially used the existence of non-Muslim minorities as one of the justifications for their involvement in the activities of native governments, but who, after being awarded territories in the region as mandate
powers following World War I, then sought stable and cohesive populations (an orientation that sidelined various minority questions). As such, from the time prior to World War II to the present day, the community has been little known in Western circles (scholarly or popular), though this is now changing, as the Assyrians have established themselves across the globe, including in the West, and have begun to write their own histories and to agitate more vocally for cultural and political recognition.

In the various accounts of the Assyrian people, whether in the records of nineteenth-century foreign missionaries or in current Assyrian political arguments, there exists a strong propensity to categorize the Assyrians as a “nation”. This categorization, however, has been symptomatic of the general popularization and dissemination of nationalistic thinking and the acceptance of the theories regarding the division of human communities into nations. As these modes of thinking were not always the lines along which populations ordered themselves, it is clear that the rise of the Assyrian “nation” has been the result of a process of change regarding Assyrian self-understanding. For, in the nineteenth century, though there existed articulations of a more secularized and inclusive understanding of the Assyrian community among certain elites, the vast majority of Assyrians thought of their people as a millet, a self-governing body defined by its particular religious and theological stance. As such, the Assyrian Church of the East, the population’s primary leadership, played the role of “identity broker”, as adherence to the church determined inclusion in the Assyrian community. But, over the course of the following decades, the situation of the Assyrians underwent many changes, such as exposure to European theories of nationalism and forms of education, an increase in hostilities between them and their neighbours, and physical dislocation and dispersion. These experiences, combined with their own entrenched sense of communal particularism, promoted a sense of “nation-ness” among many Assyrians, which for some translated into calls for national political autonomy in their homelands. The rise of a more national (or “ethnic” based) sense of Assyrian identity, however, did not abandon the community’s commitment to Christianity, nor to the Church of the East, as the church continued to be esteemed as a pillar representing Assyrian culture and vitality. Nevertheless, the difference in orientation and priorities between the secularly-conceived nationalistic movement and the church meant that the two became involved in an ambiguous relationship,
in which each offered some means of support to the other, but also challenges. Therefore, as the Assyrian self-conception developed over the twentieth century from a *millet* identity to one having its basis in secular and "ethnic" elements, the Church of the East, formerly the primary boundary of the community, came to hold a subordinated role in Assyrian identity, but one that remained very significant and visible, though problematic for the acceptance of the nationalistic movement among most Assyrians. It is this relationship between the identity of the Assyrian community and the Church of the East that will be explored in this paper, tracing it as the Assyrian identity developed from a *millet* conception to one capable of supporting a nationalistic movement.

In an exploration of the development of a nationalistic Assyrian identity, the task has been made more complex by the confusion and difference of interpretation surrounding two key ideas: what constitutes a "nation" and who is designated by the term "Assyrian". Over the course of the history of discussion on nations and national theories, many diverse understandings of what defines a nation have been proposed; similarly, the name "Assyrian" has been used in reference to various groupings of people. Chapter One, therefore, provides a brief outline of the perspective and interpretative position taken by this paper in regards to these two terms.

Chapter Two introduces the history of the Assyrian people from the time of their emergence as a Christian entity in fourth century, through the nineteenth century, the time of their existence in eastern Anatolia under the Ottomans and in western Iran under the Qajars. This was the period of the consolidation of a particularly Assyrian identity, as the community differentiated itself from other groups, and of the entrenchment of this identity through following centuries, as the Assyrians took up residence in isolated areas. Reference to the developments that occurred during these centuries is essential to achieve a fuller understanding of the general identity prominent among the Assyrians in the nineteenth century, which is necessary in order to then evaluate the changes that the community subsequently underwent. Central to these developments were the relationships and interactions of the Assyrians with their neighbours, the role and position of the Church of the East in the community, and the impact of various "outside" elements, such as the work of foreign missionaries.
The beginning of the twentieth century saw the rise of intellectual and political movements that changed the situation of the Assyrians and impacted the manner in which they understood the identity of others and themselves, as explored in Chapter Three. With the spread of nationalistic expression in the Middle East beyond the confines of elite circles as a result of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the Young Turk Revolution, the Assyrians were confronted as a community, for the first time, with nationalism as a force within their countries of residence. Moreover, the nationalistic movements of this age laid the groundwork for the development of strong, ethno-centric national identities in later years. The early part of the century was also the time of the First World War, which had a great and far-reaching impact on the Assyrian community, in that it brought displacement, significant losses, and, at the same time, opportunities for new modes of Assyrian interaction and, therefore, communal consciousness. Throughout the insecurity of the war period, the Church of the East outlived potential threats to its leadership over the community, and the Patriarchal family consolidated its role as primary Assyrian authority.

The period of the British mandate in Iraq coincided with a time of “nation-building” in the three states of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, the territories that were home for the Assyrians. Chapter Four examines the impact of the policies and goals of the central governments on the Assyrian community, as these sought to instill a country-wide sense of unity and belonging, often by suppressing other non-state sanctioned forms of loyalty and identity. The attempts of the states to unify their populace generally alienated the Assyrians and, therefore, promoted antagonism between the community and the majority populations. During this period of insecurity for the Assyrians, the Patriarch, as the recognized head of the community, vigorously petitioned the international community to provide his people with a homeland under their own authority, or that of another Christian power, as stipulated by the prerogatives accorded to nations, of which, it was argued, the Assyrians were one. But, the re-formulation of their public image as a “nation” had yet to mirror the reality of the community’s self-understanding, as the Assyrian “nation” remained virtually synonymous with the Church of the East and as the aims of the community to
return to life as it had been before the war years, both of which belied the Assyrians’ persistent millet orientation.

Chapter Five follows the varying relations of the Assyrians with the governments of the “old countries” in the later twentieth century (post-World War II), which evidenced both accommodation and resistance, and the establishment of a strong Assyrian community in the diaspora. While some Assyrians chose to continue actively to oppose government policies, the tensions of the community with their governments and larger societies, along with newly-enhanced means of government control, led many Assyrians to attempt accommodation with the central authorities of their countries, though they did not abandon their sense of communal particularity. A great number of others, however, opted to leave their homelands and seek out social and political security elsewhere. The environment of the diaspora, combined with a general internalization of the theories of nations and nationalism, produced a shift in the conception of Assyrian identity that emphasized the secular elements of language and ancestry. Regardless of this secularization of Assyrian self-conception, the Church of the East continued to hold a central place in Assyrian consciousness, though only as one of many cultural elements, rather than as pre-eminent “gate keeper” to the community. However, owing to the difference in goals and priorities of the church and the nationalistic segment of the Assyrian community, there developed an underlying tension in their relationship, although both continued to support, directly and indirectly, the promotion of the other.

Despite the relatively small size of the Assyrian community on the international scene, an exploration of modern Assyrian identity provides indications of some valuable insights into the dynamics of nationalism and national identities with pre-existing communal identities and into the significance of minority-majority relations to the developments of history. As regards the rise of a national-type consciousness, the process of mutation of the Assyrian identity employed many of the same “building blocks” from one age to the next, but combined them differently in response to changing circumstances and thus produced a “new” secularized identity with divergent orientations from the pre-existing Assyrian identity, which was not wholly eclipsed by the advent of the alternative form of self-understanding. This mutation underscores the variable “face” of communal identities in general, as well as the manner in
which national identity grows from, but also alters, elements of pre-existing group self-understandings. Moreover, the particular manifestation of Assyrian nationalism highlights the often problematic dependence that secular national identities have on the religiously-bound core of the original community, and thus the continuing interplay in which the secular and spiritual realms engage despite many vocal assertions of the separation of “church / mosque / temple / synagogue” and “state”.

Additionally, however, the process of the evolution of Assyrian identity must be viewed from within its historical context. For the stimuli prompting the Assyrians continually to re-consider and re-affirm their communal self-consciousness came from the pressures brought to bear on them at different times and in different ways by neighbouring peoples, local governments, and foreign interests. On the other hand, the Assyrians were not simply receivers of outside influences, for not only did the roots of their identity emanate from within their community, but they were also authors of impetus for change. That is, the corollary of the acknowledgement of the impact of outside forces on the Assyrians is the realization that those outside forces were also impacted by the Assyrians and were made to react in response to them. For example, the fact that the various authorities had policies of suppression, eradication, or co-existence indicated that the Assyrians (and other non-governing communities) were the cause of action on the part of the majority. In other words, although the history of the Assyrians is typically either ignored or dealt with as a “stand alone”, it must be viewed as part of the mutual interaction of the Assyrian community and those surrounding them.
Chapter One: Definitions

Nation and Nationalism

Nationalism has established itself as one of the great forces of the modern era. It has demonstrated its ability to unite and divide people in the millions, to produce revolutions (whether military or ideological), and to alter the social, political, and economic map of the globe. Leaders of various stripes, political or quasi-political, crave and pursue the legitimizing and mobilizing power of nationalism. Moreover, it has become a global phenomenon. As Benedict Anderson notes, "The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism', so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time". ¹ Even more than this, however, it is perhaps the establishment of nationalism as a new value that imbues it with such potency; in the words of Anthony D. Smith: "Today national identity is the main form of collective identification. Whatever the feelings of individuals, it provides the dominant criteria of culture and identity, the sole principle of government and the chief focus of social and economic activity".²

Nevertheless, despite its great popularity and apparent desirability, nationalism remains a largely vague and imprecise concept. This is due, for the most part, to the imperfect understanding of what constitutes or defines a "nation", as the foundational component in any conception of nationalism. The confusion surrounding the idea of "the nation" is not limited to the popular realm, but has also been the defining characteristic of scholarly discussions on nations and nationalism, both theoretical and particular. The first serious body of work on the question of nations and nationalism was produced in the nineteenth century, by which time nationalism had established itself as a force to be reckoned with in Europe, but the work was concerned primarily with exploring specific manifestations of nationalism, rather than developing a general theory of the phenomenon.³ Despite some variety of thought, the general perspective on "the nation" was that it was natural, immemorial, and, therefore, eternal; in other words, nations were viewed as perennial and primordial, which was also the claim of nationalists themselves.⁴

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⁴Ibid., p. 18.
By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, however, seeds were planted for a view of nations and nationalism that was in opposition to the “essentialist” perspective.\(^5\) Though the earlier view of the perennial and primordial nation was never universally abandoned, the 1960s saw the entrenchment of the so-called “modernist” interpretation of nations and nationalism. Again, as with the essentialist view, there has been much variety among modernists in regard to the details of their theses, but Anthony D. Smith identifies several key notions which enjoy general, if not unmitigated, acceptance; these “tenets” of the modernist paradigm may be summarized as the following: the nation is recent and modern (vs. immemorial and perennial), and its advent is the product of recent and modern conditions; the nation is created (vs. natural), and it is constructed specifically by elites; and the nation is a territorialized political community (vs. a politicized ethno-cultural community), and membership in a nation is a civic rather than a cultural or ethnic affair.\(^6\) These modernist assumptions underlay much of the analysis of nationalism and national identities through the latter half of the twentieth century and are exemplified in the work of such esteemed writers as Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson.

With the failure of nationalism to pass away or to be subsumed under larger identities -- seemingly in opposition to the pressures of globalization-- and the resurgence of strong ethnic nationalism --counter to the predictions of modernist theories, which emphasized the implausibility of nationalism outside of its particular “modern era” environment-- there have increasingly been attempts to move beyond the modernist paradigm to “post-modernist” models and explanations. Perennialist and primordialist theories have gained new interest as well, and there additionally have emerged new directions that often draw on the insights of both modernist and essentialist offerings. Among other names such as John Hutchinson and John Armstrong, one of the most prolific writers in this last category has been Anthony D. Smith, a student of Ernest Gellner. Smith proposes an “ethno-symbolic” approach to understanding the nature of nations, which explores the relationship of the “ethnic legacy”, as it might be called, of a nation to its modern nationalist identity; that is, Smith concludes that pre-modern identities, as demonstrated in symbols, myths, values, and memories, are key in inspiring national attachments and

\(^{5}\textit{ibid},\ p.\ 11.\
\(^{6}\textit{ibid},\ p.\ 22-23.\)
their necessary networks and in the re-interpretation of the past and symbols by nationalists in their aim of mobilizing their community. In Smith’s estimation, therefore, nations cannot be viewed as purely modern constructs, but as communities with “navels” (i.e. roots or pre-existing associations) whose symbols, boundaries, or other identity elements have been imbued with new or altered meanings.

As demonstrated by the above synopsis of views illustrative of those current in the field of nationalism studies, the need for a clear outline of the perspective taken in any exploration on nationalist movements or related projects is obvious, as there exists a plurality of understandings of what constitutes a nation and, therefore, at least an equal number of perspectives on the “when” and “how” of nation- or national identity-formation. As such, it must be stated that this paper largely concurs with the sentiments of Smith’s definition of a nation, namely, that a nation is “a named human population occupying a historic territory or homeland and sharing common myths and memories; a mass public culture; a single economy; and common rights and duties for all members”. That is, a nation must be recognized as a distinct community by its own members and by those outside the community. Moreover, it is the position of this paper that the myths and memories of a nation are the primary means of its distinction and differentiation: the members of the nation, regardless of minor individual aberrations, share a common view of the past (therefore seen as a shared past), which provides them with notions of shared experience

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10This is derived from Fredrik Barth’s seminal anthropological analysis of ethnic groups and their maintenance, in which he asserts that ethnic groupings are not based primarily on cultural (i.e. objective) content, though that may be an implication or result of ethnic differentiation, but on ascription of a community’s members to the socially relevant factors which act as boundaries separating it from other groups. As he explains, “It makes no difference how dissimilar members maybe in their overt behaviour --if they say they are A, in contrast to another cognate category B, they are willing to be treated and let their own behaviour be interpreted and judged as A’s and not as B’s; in other words, they declare their allegiance to the shared culture of A’s”. Fredrik Barth, “Introduction”, in Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference, ed. Fredrik Barth, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969, pp. 15. If this be the perspective on ethnic groups, how much more relevant for nations.
that become the basis of remembrance in the present, in the forms of rites, rituals, myths, etc. The memory of the past functions to unite the population in the present and to demarcate it from other populations. Having a sense of shared past and united present, the community, consequently, should demonstrate, generally speaking, a common orientation on the future, in terms of goals, direction, aspirations or the like. These common sentiments must have a political dimension that seeks expression in institutions (political, legal, etc.). The sense of common past, present, and future is the inspiration or content of a “mass public culture”, which Smith also explains as “a measure of common culture and a civic ideology”. Additionally, the mass public culture overrides other measures of distinctiveness within the community; that is, that the common culture of the nation (which, harkening back to Barth, is a matter of selective boundary-marking elements, versus the actual content of those elements) is the primary means of determining membership. Combined with the afore-mentioned institutions, this results in notions of legal equality among members of the nation.

Other elements of Smith’s definition of the nation prove to be more troublesome, however, in particular his emphasis on the occupation of a historic territory by a population and the consequent restrictions of this emphasis. While the essential nature of a territorial dimension in national identity must be acknowledged, Smith perhaps overstates the case when he determines that “[a] landless nation is a contradiction in terms”. Certainly the ultimate quest of any nation is sovereignty in a territory considered to be its “homeland”, and a fundamental characteristic of national identity is its association with a particular soil, to the extent that it is perceived by nationalists that each belongs to the other in a unique and near-exclusive sense. But to stipulate that a community must “possess” its homeland, by which Smith apparently implies “control” or at least “dominate” and not simply “inhabitant”, is to ignore

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11One author describes public commemoration of the past as establishing “invisible ties between the communities of the living and the dead”; in other words, the past lives again (or on) in the present (Yael Zerubavel, Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of the Israeli National Tradition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. xvii).
12Smith, National Identity, p. 10.
13Ibid., p. 11.
14Ibid., p. 10.
15Smith, Myths and Memories, p. 149.
16C.f. Smith’s remarks in National Identity, p. 9; and Myths and Memories, pp. 149-159.
the reality of many minority movements seeking what could otherwise be considered national autonomy. However, it must be recognized that there is a difference, for instance, in the identities articulated by such people groups as the Kurds as compared to the Egyptian Copts: the former could not have been said to “possess” their homeland in the sense required by Smith, other than inhabiting it, when clear calls for national-type autonomy emerged; yet that very articulation of a widespread, if factionalized, desire for self-governance must distinguish the Kurds from the Copts, who, though similar to the Kurds in their demonstration of a strong and distinct identity, are not characterized by a struggle for self-determination.

Furthermore, populations outside of their traditional homelands cannot simply be “disinherited” and dismissed as mere cultural units abroad, due to the great importance of diaspora efforts for many minority or non-state nationalisms: not only do many diaspora communities provide the greatest resources and drive for maintaining cultural distinctiveness and communication among dispersed branches of the community, but at times also establish “political institutions in exile”, as in the case of the Kurds and the Palestinians up to the 1990s. As such, concerning the working definition of “nation” for this paper, although a nation must identify with a clearly demarcated territory, considered to be its unique “homeland”, and hold an ultimate goal of inhabitation and political control of that territory, actual “possession” of a land and the existence of state-type institutions and structures are not in and of themselves determining factors of “nation-ness”.

In brief, therefore, the position of this paper is that the nation is a convergence of the identity of the individual, the collective, and the state (whether actual or projected): the individual member is virtually synonymous with the community, which in turn aims to be fully realized in a cohesive and

17“A nation must possess its homeland; an ethnie need not --hence, the phenomenon of diaspora ethnies” (Smith, The Nation in History, p. 65). According to this statement, it is a community’s possession of its homeland that is a determining factor in its status as either a nation or an ethnic community. Moreover, Smith indicates that possession concerns the whereabouts of the majority of the community and / or its political relationship to the territory. For, although Smith specifies in his definition of nationalism that it is “an ideological movement aiming to attain or maintain autonomy, unity and identity for a social group which is deemed to constitute a nation” (National Identity, p. 51; emphasis added), for examples of populations previously displaced or severed from their historic territories and who, therefore, comprised only ethnic communities and not nations, Smith refers to the Armenians, Jews, and Greeks (Myths and Memories, p. 149). All three of these communities, however, were never completely driven from their homelands and the Greeks, for their part, still constituted the dominant population in the area even under Ottoman rule. Furthermore, in Smith’s view, territory forms part of the “civic elements” indicative of the nation (the others being civic culture, common laws, and single economy), which distinguish it from the ethnic community (Nation in History, p. 65), thereby linking “possession” of the homeland with the existence of state-structured institutions and initiatives.
comprehensive (i.e. united and incorporating all members deemed to be part of the nation) geo-political entity. The nation is essentially an “imagined community”, to borrow Anderson’s famous phrase; not in the sense of “falsely fabricated” community, but rather in the sense that, as all social units comprised of individuals who are not in personal contact with one another (which is anything more extensive than a village-sized unit), the members of the nation do not know the vast majority of their fellow nationals and never will. “yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”. The nation, so defined, is a recent development in human history and is “built” by nationalists, who “invent traditions” by re-interpreting symbolic elements already associated with the community, elements whose significance for the community is often long established and, therefore, which are seen as inherent signs of identity.

These re-interpreted symbols of a community’s identity represent their shared past and present common culture; in other words, they are the signs of identity and unity. The nation is unified through its shared memory, centred on a particular homeland and resulting in a unified political will, which demonstrates itself in the transcendence of national identity over other social divisions and which is expressed in a common culture, in an equality of regard for all members, and in the goal of territorial-political articulation of the community’s “peoplehood”. Having detailed what may be considered the traits and markings of a nation, nationalism poses much less of a problem; to borrow Smith’s definition once again: nationalism is “an ideological movement aiming to attain or maintain autonomy, unity and identity for a social group which is deemed to constitute a nation”.

Assyrians

The second term in need of clarification is that describing the particular community at the centre of this study: the Assyrians. Although many Westerners are acquainted with the name “Assyrian”, it is

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18 Anderson, p. 6.
19 Eric Hobsbawm coined the term “invented tradition” (Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), though Smith cautions against viewing nationalistic traditions as entirely new creations, dreamed up by nationalists; rather he concludes that the identity put forth by nationalists must resonate with the people and whose symbols, therefore, must already carry meaning, though the traditional meaning may be re-shaped by the nationalists. Some nationalistic traditions are pure inventions of nationalists, but these are much rarer, as they hold no immediate recognition with the masses. See for example Smith’s comments in *Myths and Memories*, p. 193; *Nationalism and Modernism*, pp. 180-187. Although Smith rejects the term “invented” for these re-interpreted traditions (*Nationalism and Modernism*, p. 187), it could also be argued that they can be considered new due to the re-formulated meanings given to the symbols, long-standing though they may be.
typically in reference to a empire of antiquity and most are not aware of the existence of a modern community by that name, nor of its links with and distinctions from the ancient civilization. Moreover, many contemporary authors, in writing on the modern Assyrians, do not specify the population grouping to which they refer, thereby augmenting the confusion, as several constellations of peoples may be included under the designation "Assyrian".

Perhaps the most common use of the Assyrian name is in identifying the people of an ancient civilization and empire. The heartland of the Assyrian people lay along the middle Tigris, reaching just north of Mosul, south to the Jebel Hamrin hills (roughly 285 kilometers north of Baghdad), west across the Jazira plain as far as the Khabur river, and east to the Zagros mountains south of Lake Urmiya.21 Between the beginning of the second millennium BCE (with the rise of Shamshi-Adad in Ashur around 1813 BCE)22 and 612 BCE (with the fall of the Neo-Assyrian empire) the Assyrians raised a series of empires stretching across Mesopotamia and beyond, even as far as the borders of Egypt and Iran. In fact, the city of Nineveh from the story of Jonah in the Hebrew Scriptures was a great Assyrian centre. The legacy handed down from the people groups of Mesopotamia from this great age, of which the Assyrians form an important part, is renowned: cuneiform, ziggurats, legal codes, and military and administrative organization. In 612 BCE Assyrian power was shattered by the Chaldeans with the support of the Medes, and Nineveh was torched; the Iranians, under Cyrus II, subsequently overtook the region and retained Mesopotamia for several centuries, until they, in turn, were defeated by the Parthians, who held the region into the first centuries of the Common Era.

Since the beginning of the Christian era, however, "Assyrian" has most often been used to designate the population associated with the eastern branch of the Syrian Church. The East Syrian Church, called the Church of the East, split theologically from the Byzantine Orthodox Church following the third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431. The Council condemned the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, for his christological teachings, teachings that were adopted by the Church of the East. It is due to this theological development that the Church of the East has often been known as the Nestorian.

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22Although Shamshi-Adad did not establish an empire (in fact, Saggs argues that it was not until the time of Ashur-uballit (1365-1330) that the Assyrians became an empire), he was the first to unite the three major cities of Ashur, Nineveh, and Erbil under one king, thereby controlling the regions of "Assyria" (ibid. pp. 36, 43).
Church, especially in the West; however, because of the condemnatory connotations of the term “Nestorian”, the name fell out of use over the course of the twentieth century. Consequently, “Assyrian” has become the more common name for the members of the Church of the East. In the seventeenth century, contacts between the Eastern Syrians and Roman Catholic missionaries resulted in the emergence of an Assyrian church in communion with Rome; its adherents are usually identified as “Chaldeans” and the church as the Chaldean Church (though it is possible to find “Nestorian Catholic” or other variants). The nineteenth century, and renewed Western missions among the Assyrian Christian community, produced Protestant churches from the Church of the East. The name “Assyrian”, therefore, may be found to refer to all the East Syrian derivatives (“Nestorian”, Chaldean, and Protestant), the Chaldeans and “Nestorians” together (sometimes clarified by the term “Assyro-Chaldean”), or the “Nestorians” alone.

A third meaning for the name “Assyrian” carries a more recent and secularized usage. Among some Syrian Christians (East and West), “Assyrian” designates all those with Aramean roots, in other words, those whose original language is Syriac and who claim descent from the ancient Aramean, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Chaldean civilizations. Both the East (“Nestorian”, Chaldean, Protestant) and West (Jacobite / Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Protestant) Syrians are included under this rubric, as well as typically the Maronites and occasionally even some Muslim and Yazidi populations.

This usage heightens the “ethnic” associations of the name, as opposed to its traditional religious determination, and greatly broadens the scope of membership; it is employed particularly by those currently seeking to


emphasize and reinforce the secular ethnic dimension of Assyrian identity, which is usually concomitant with efforts to establish recognition of the Assyrians as a national-type community.

The first meaning of “Assyrian”, that is, as an ancient civilization and empire, is not of much concern for the study to follow, simply because of its modern focus; this study opts for the simple qualifier “ancient” when reference must be made to these Assyrians. The other two meanings of “Assyrian”, as a religious community and denomination (with its various internal variations) and as an ethnic or national community, however, are much more likely to cause confusion. As such, for the purposes of this paper, “Assyrian” and “Assyrians” shall designate the community and members of the church traditionally known as “Nestorian”, as well as the church itself; “Chaldean” the Catholic offshoot; and “Assyro-Chaldean” the two branches of the East Syrian Church in combination. In those instances when reference shall be made to the modern nationalist-type movement and ideas, the larger, more inclusive notion of the Assyrian shall be made explicit. Although in selecting the term “Assyrian” to be the default designator in accordance with one of its two principal interpretations in current usage, the religious or denominational understanding of “Assyrian” has been chosen due to its apparent continued dominance among both East and West Syrians of all persuasions at this time; should this balance alter, so should the “ownership” of the name.
Chapter Two: A Brief History of the East Syrian Christians Through the Nineteenth Century

In order to trace the developments in a people’s identity, it is necessary to understand the forces, events, and experiences that work to shape it. That is, how the legacy of history molds and influences a communal identity. As the definition used by this paper to designate the Assyrian people is denominationally-based, the exploration of Assyrian history begins with the advent of Christianity in the community. For, it was from that point on that the Assyrians differentiated themselves as a distinct religious community, living with religion as at least a primary, if not the primary, key to membership in the collective. The history that the Assyrians subsequently experienced reinforced the boundaries between them and other peoples and provided them with communal identity-forming memories. It was this Assyrian-as-a-religious-community identity that confronted the would-be architects of the modern inclusive nationalistic-type Assyrian identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for whom the traditional Assyrian identity became both an important foundation for the development of a non-confessional-specific Assyrian identity and also a strong hindrance. As such, it is necessary to comprehend the formation and development of the Assyrian denominational identity, as fostered over the course of its history.

Romans, Parthians, and Christians

At the dawn of what eventually came to be regarded in the West as the Christian era, the region of Mesopotamia—the heartland of the speakers of Aramean1 (known as Syrians2)—was the frontier of two great powers: the Romans and the Parthians. The two states had already established a history of mutual hostility by the first century CE, with the Euphrates acting as the approximate boundary between them. The Parthians, like the Romans, were foreign rulers in the area, governing an indigenous

1Aramean, or Aramaic, was the language of Syria from the time of the ancient Arameans and Assyrians, but over the centuries diversified into several regional dialects, including some from areas outside of Syria such as Palestine, Palmyra, and Mesopotamia. W. Stewart McCullough, A Short History of Syriac Christianity to the Rise of Islam, Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982, p. 9; and Raymond Le Coz, Histoire de L’Église d’Orient: Chrétiens d’Irak, d’Iran et de Turquie, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1995, pp. 107-108.
2Suraye or Suroyo in Syriac, the name “Syrian” was the self-identification used by the Syriac-speaking Christians until the period of the First World War, according to John Joseph (Modern Assyrians, p. 9). The name was derived from the Greek in the third or fourth century BCE and came into use with the Greek conquests under Alexander the Great; it was reinforced with the translation of the Greek-language Septuagint in the early years of the Church (ibid, pp. 9-12).
population, and both Roman and Parthian societies were largely pagan in religion. But the Roman Empire soon experienced the advent of a new religious movement within its borders, one that was monotheistic, evidencing its Jewish roots, yet claiming distinction from the Jewish religion. It appears that it was at Antioch, in the first century CE, that the adherents of this new movement were first called Christians. and Christianity, over the course of the following few centuries, extended throughout the Roman-occupied Middle East, and beyond, to become a monumental force in subsequent Middle Eastern history.

The process and chronology of Christianity's dissemination and acceptance among the Syrarians is uncertain, due to a lack of historical data. In the tradition of the Assyrian Church, however, there are cherished stories explaining the arrival of the Christian gospel east of Antioch. One, as related in the apocryphal Acts of St. Thomas, describes the missionary journey of the apostle Thomas to India, the outcome of which was the St. Thomas Christians. On his way to the sub-continent, though, Thomas made a stop in the vicinity of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Mesopotamia and converted some of the inhabitants.

Despite Thomas' relatively brief stay, his associations with the Syrian church endured and, so says the legend, after his death in India, his body was smuggled back to the Middle East for burial. Another story links the Syrian church directly with Jesus: in this story, Abgar V (the Black), King of Edessa (in northern Mesopotamia), having heard of the miraculous teacher in Palestine and himself suffering from leprosy, wrote to Jesus inviting him to come and preach in Edessa. Jesus replied, commending the king for his faith, but explaining that he needed to complete the work given to him. Nevertheless, Jesus did promise to send one of his disciples to Abgar, a promise fulfilled by the disciples after the Ascension when Addai (Thaddeus), a disciple of Thomas, was sent to Edessa. Addai baptized the king and all his subjects and, before his death, appointed a successor, thereby establishing a tradition of apostolic succession for the church. Regardless of their lack of historical merit, the obvious benefit of both these legends is that they claim apostolic origins for the Syrian church.

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3 According to the Christian New Testament in Acts 11: 26 and as repeated by historians of the early Church.
4 Ascribed to Edessene writer Bardesanes (154-222).
5 Le Coz, p. 21.
8 Atiya, p. 245. Atiya acknowledges the traditional belief that apostolic succession was ensured even after a long vacancy following the death of the second bishop of Edessa, as Palut, the third bishop, was consecrated by Serapian, bishop of Antioch, who himself had been consecrated by Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome (of whose see the
Although the historical origins of Syrian Christianity are veiled in obscurity, it is fairly certain that there were Christians east of Antioch by the second century, as evidenced by sources from the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries. The second century was a period of renewed hostilities between the Romans and the Parthians, and the frontier region in Mesopotamia changed hands frequently; just prior to the fall of the Parthians in 224, Nisibis was under the Parthians, while Edessa was subject to Rome, both towns being important Syrian centres. Speculating again, it appears most likely that Christian missionaries traveled east from Antioch, gaining converts first in Edessa, then in Nisibis, and then further into Parthian territory. Some authors suggest that the initial intended audience of the missionaries was the Eastern Jewish community; however, it appears mainly the Syrian populations responded to the evangelization, along with some Iranians.

The acceptance of Christianity among the Syrians heralded the beginning of a new phase in their identity. As Christians, the Syrians submerged other affiliations to the universalist association of the Church. This spiritual identity is conveyed in the early Syriac writings of the Syrian church, in that the community was portrayed as the New People or Nation, having its members drawn from many peoples or “nations”. Concretely, this universal Christian identity was demonstrated in the orientation of the early

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9 Some of these sources include an epitaph of the bishop of Hieropolis (in Phrygia) who was traveling through Syria and northern Mesopotamia in the late second century; the Chronicle of Edessa, which records that a flood destroyed the church of the Christians in 201; and Eusebius' narration of a controversy regarding the celebration of Easter at the end of the second century (McCullough, pp. 22-24.). Wolfgang Hage asserts that the Christianity may have taken root among the Syrians as early as the first half of the second century, though he bases this on the Chronicle of Arbela, whose reliability, as he notes, is questioned (Syriac Christianity in the East, Kottayam, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1988, p. 2). McCullough, for his part, suggests that Syrian conversion early in the second century, or even late in the first, cannot be completely ruled out, but cautions that there is no evidence to support this notion (p. 21).

10 ibid, pp. 3-6. McCullough notes that although trade between (Parthian) Mesopotamia and (Roman) Syria was of high economic value, as well as an aid to the dissemination of ideas, the instability of the region of the whole region due to the Roman-Parthian wars would have hindered all but the most zealous of merchants and, presumably, missionaries, thereby providing more justification for a later start date of Christianity in the East (pp. 7-8, 21-22).

11 ibid, pp. 22, 97-99.

12 ibid, Le Coz, p. 22.

13 Hage, p. 3; Le Coz, p. 23; Christine Mary Drennon, "(Re)Inventing Macedonia: The Passage from Religious to Territorial Identity", diss. University of Texas at Austin, 1998, p. 179.


15 Brock, “Christians in the Sasanian Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties”, in Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity. Part IV. London: Variorum Reprints, 1984, p. 12; Robert Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A
Syrian church, which was not organized independently or on a geographical, linguistic, or ethnic basis, but was under the influence of the (Roman) Edessene church, and the whole Aramean-speaking region looked to Roman Antioch as the pinnacle of ecclesiastical authority.\textsuperscript{16} Developments in the Syrian church, however, and in the identity of the Syrian Christians were greatly impacted by the subsequent political upheavals of the day.

**The Syrian Church in Roman and Sasanian Territory**

Parthian power was broken in 224 by the Sasanians, bringing to an end five and a half centuries of non-Iranian rule in Iran. The Sasanians largely followed in the steps of the Parthians \textit{vis-à-vis} relations with the Romans, as hostilities between the two soon erupted and continued intermittently until the fall of the Iranian empire to the Muslims; once again, the region of Mesopotamia became contested borderland. Of particular importance for the emerging Syrian church, however, was the attitude of both ruling powers towards their growing Christian minorities. The Romans, although not condoning the new religion, which for most of the first century was viewed as a deviant Jewish sect, generally left the Christians alone.\textsuperscript{17} Though there were bouts of persecution, these were neither systematic nor sustained, and the treatment of Christian populations varied according to region and the disposition of regional governors.\textsuperscript{18} With the rise of the emperor Decius (249-51), however, began the first official Roman repression of Christians,\textsuperscript{19} and from this time forward until the arrival of Constantine, more often than not, Christianity was viewed as detrimental to the power of the state and, therefore, as requiring eradication. The Sasanians, for their part, were initially tolerant of Christians in Iran.\textsuperscript{20} But owing to the concomitant re-emergence of Zoroastrianism alongside, or one might say as part of, the renewal of Iranian rulership, the Zoroastrian (Magian) clergy gained much power and influence in the Sasanian court.\textsuperscript{21} The Magians were consistently

\textsuperscript{16}Le Coz, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{17}McCullough, pp. 10-11, 18.
\textsuperscript{18}ibid, pp. 18-19. In fact, McCullough notes that those Christians living outside of larger centres probably experienced little, if any, interference by the authorities.
\textsuperscript{19}ibid, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{20}ibid, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{21}ibid, pp. 101-102.
opposed to all non-Zoroastrian religion, and, therefore, in those times when the court depended on their support, persecutions typically broke out against Christians. Conversely, however, as the Christians were despised by the Romans, the Sasanians often treated the religious minority quite well. In fact, although the continuing wars with Rome were a destabilizing factor in the region, Sasanian incursions into Roman Syria aided the growth of the Church in Iran, in that, as was customary, large numbers of captives were brought into Iran, a certain number of them being Christian (both Syriac- and Greek-speaking), and settled among the indigenous population.

Soon, however, the Sasanians were given reason to treat Christians with suspicion, namely the Roman adoption of Christianity as the empire’s official religion. In 313, the co-emperors Constantine and Licinius agreed that persecutions should end and religious toleration be the norm. Constantine eventually became sole leader of the Roman empire, and he continued to show favour to the Christians, himself converting shortly before his death. Notwithstanding a few early exceptions, the (East) Roman emperors, eventually known as “Byzantine”, followed in Constantine’s steps and made Christianity the religion of their realm. As such, the Byzantine state became closely associated with the Christian religion, to the extent that political ventures on the part of the Byzantines became imbued with religious significance.

As might be imagined, this was a dangerous development for the Christians inside Iranian territory, due to their association with the enemy as co-religionists: in times of trouble, the Christians were targeted as conspirators or simply as being “like-minded persons and supporters of the Emperor”. Though the severity of the resulting persecutions visited upon the Christians in Iran varied, still being dependent on the particulars of a given situation, the persecutions had, nevertheless, gained official sanction and direction.

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22Sebastian Brock notes that Shapur I treated the large number of Christian deportees arriving in Iran from Syria with “considerable favour” because of Valerian’s persecution of Christians in the eastern Roman provinces (“Christians in the Sasanian Empire”, p. 7).
23McCullough, p. 113.
24The vast Roman empire lost its European territories to a series of “barbarian” invasions, when mostly Germanic tribes overran the western portions of the empire. Constantine, however, had moved the Roman capital to Constantinople in 330, and thus the “East Romans” continued the legacy of Rome in the Middle East. The melding of the various influences --Christian, Middle Eastern, and Roman-- produced the civilization known as Byzantine (ibid, pp. 40-41).
27McCullough, pp. 117-118.
Despite the insecurities and upheavals experienced by the Syriac-speaking Christians, whether in Roman or Iranian territory, the third and fourth centuries had been a time of consolidation and growth, both in terms of community and theology. For the Roman Christians, although growth of their numbers in the frontier region of Mesopotamia may have been retarded due to the frequency of war, Constantine’s sponsorship of Christianity meant expansion for the Church as a whole, though it in no way eradicated paganism (which only gradually faded from view) or Judaism (which, obviously, endured). Moreover, Edessa emerged as the location of an important theological school and training ground for Syrian clergy. Unlike the Syrian churches on Roman soil, which continued to be firmly under the authority of the See of Antioch, the Aramean-speaking churches in Iran gradually developed their own hierarchy and organization. Already at the beginning of the fourth century, the bishop of Seleucia actively promoted a centralized and autonomous Iranian Church, and John of Penek, writing in the eighth century, notes that in 309 the church in Koke (a district of Seleucia) was given jurisdiction over the priests in the East (i.e. Iran) from the ecclesiastical authority in Antioch. It was not long in coming until the Syrian bishops of Iran began to officially meet together, the first synod being recorded in 410 at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the see which was the de facto head of the Church in Iran. The synod of 410 was significant for three reasons: it was held under the direction of the Shah, Yazdgard I; it was instigated by the Byzantine emissary Marutha of Martyropolis, who had gained the favour and respect of Yazdgard and who wished to convey messages to the eastern churches from the western and to encourage the bishops to accept several canons (decided at the Council of Nicea); and it formally recognized the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon as the Catholicos of the Iranian Church. As such, the synod effectively demonstrated three important elements

28After Nisibis, another important Syrian Christian centre, was transferred to the Sasanians in 363 from the Romans, many of the community’s members, including Ephraem (Ephraim), one of the most celebrated figures of the church, migrated to Edessa (ibid, pp. 58, 61). Edessa’s subsequent prominence in the Syrian world was perhaps the prime reason that the city’s dialect of Aramean, called Syriac, came to be the language of both the East and West branches of the Syrian church. See McCullough’s comments on Syriac, pp. 9-10.

29Ibid, p. 118.

30Le Coz, p. 26. This meant that the Iranian churches were now only indirectly under Antioch, via the representation of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Le Coz comments that this change was initiated due to the high number of priests that had been killed in crossing the volatile border between Iranian and Byzantine territory for the purpose of visiting the Metropolitan in Antioch for church affairs.

31McCullough notes that there were probably gatherings of bishops prior to 410, but that, due to the persecutions, they were clandestine and, therefore, unrecorded (p. 121).

in the life of the Iranian Church: it established the ties between the Iranian Church and the Sasanian court that were to endure until the fall of the dynasty; it underscored the eastern churches' continuing theological dependence upon the Roman Church (in their acceptance of the Nicene Creed and other canons); and yet it laid the foundation for the self-governance of the Iranian churches.

Over the course of the fifth century, the Church in Iran furthered its autocephalous development, and soon not only distinguished itself from the Roman Church, but deliberately distanced itself from the Church in the west. At the third Ecumenical Council of the Byzantine church, held at Ephesus in 431, Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople, and his diphysite teachings on the nature of Christ were condemned and the unity of Christ’s nature stressed. Christological controversies had gripped the church before, but “Nestorianism”, as the supposed heresy was termed, produced a lasting schism. Nestorius was exiled, eventually making his way to North Africa, and his followers were repressed, as they adhered to a now “illegal” theological view. Nestorius’ christological perspectives, however, had well-established roots in the Syrian community: one of the great influences on Nestorius’ theological formation had been Theodore of Mopsuestia, “the most prominent member of the Antiochene School of exegesis”. In 435, Ibas, a teacher at the aforementioned School of Edessa, became the new bishop of the town, and though he never openly accepted Nestorius’ teachings, he was a great translator of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s work and proved himself very sympathetic to the so-called “Nestorians” in his midst; moreover, he continued to teach at the school after becoming bishop. As can be imagined, the thought of Theodore of Mopsuestia, which was at the heart of Nestorius’ views, was passed to a number of Syrian

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33Nestorius distinguished quite strongly between the divine and human nature in Christ, though insisting that Jesus was still fully both God and man, to the point that the bishop rejected the term Theotokos (“Mother of God”) to describe Mary, explaining that she was mother only to Jesus’ humanity. But Cyril, a great rival to Nestorius and bishop of Alexandria, feared the teaching essentially split Christ’s nature into two separate entities, in a sense having two different personalities at work inside the one person. As Timothy Ware (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia) notes, however, the apparently contrary perspectives of Nestorius and Cyril were largely due to the distinct theological milieus from which they came, one from the more Semitic Antiochene school and the other from the Hellenistic Alexandrian school (The Orthodox Church, Pelican Books, 1963, rpt: London: Penguin Books, 1997, pp. 24-25).


35Atiya, p. 251. In fact, because of his sympathies, Ibas was deposed in 449, but re-instated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.
clergy, particularly clergy from Iran, whose only option for theological training was at Edessa, despite the Council's condemnation and exile of Nestorius.36

Divided Syrian theological loyalties were given further definition by the fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451, which this time swung the proverbial pendulum in the other direction, when it condemned the so-called heresy of monophysitism37 and proclaimed that Christ was one person in two natures. Notwithstanding the resulting legal injunction against the condemned christological view, two Monophysites rose to the ecclesial throne at Edessa following Ibas' death in 457. This had a two-fold impact: the first was that the subsequently strong monophysite environment created tensions between the school and the local clergy and persuaded a number of diphysite adherents to leave Edessa for Nisibis, inside Iran; the second was the eventual closing of the School of Edessa in 489 by order of emperor Zeno on account of its "heretical" monophysite teachings.38 Many of the teachers and students of Iranian origin, therefore, imbued with Nestorian or Nestorian-inspired teachings from Edessa, returned to Iran and rose to prominence within their Church. The exodus of diphysite teachers from Edessa and the closing of its School39 resulted in the creation of the theological school at Nisibis (most likely founded c.470-490), which came to serve as the primary training ground for Iranian clergy. As the School in Nisibis was headed by ardent Diphysites and saw itself as a replacement of the school-gone-awry at Edessa, the base of its biblical studies was the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia.40 As such, "Nestorian" teachings gradually permeated the Iranian Syrian church, while they were concurrently extinguished in the Syrian church in the west. The culmination of this theological division came in 484, when the synod of Iranian bishops blessed the memory of Theodore of Mopsuestia and condemned all other doctrine emanating from the Byzantine church.41 Ecclesiastical links between East and West had been weakened in 424 when the Iranian synod declared that the Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was the highest ecclesiastical

36McCullough, p. 128.
37Monophysitism is derived from the Alexandrian position articulated by Cyril at the previous Ecumenical Council, which emphasized the unity of Christ's nature. Cyril's successor in Alexandria insisted that though Christ was from two natures, after his incarnation these became one, effectively producing in Christ a melded "divino-human" nature. Critics of this view, however, argue that this nature is neither fully human, nor fully divine and, therefore, a heresy. Ware, p. 25.
38McCullough, pp. 127-128.
39What diphysite teaching had remained at Edessa finally came to an end with the closing of the School (Atiya, p. 252).
40McCullough, pp. 128-130.
authority for Iranian clergy, which fully deprived Antioch of its traditional role in this respect;\textsuperscript{42} but in 498 the Iranian church finally broke all dependence on the west when Catholicos Mar Babowi took the title of Patriarch of the East, thereby raising his see to equal those of Antioch, Alexandria, or Rome.\textsuperscript{43}

There were, of course, politically-informed motives for the break with the Byzantine church as well: although it appears that most Christians in Iran behaved as loyal members of Iranian society (whether out of natural conviction or out of conviction born of necessity),\textsuperscript{44} they often continued to fill the role of scapegoat into the late sixth century and were always thrown into a precarious position whenever war erupted with Constantinople.\textsuperscript{45} In disassociating themselves both theologically and hierarchically from the Byzantine Orthodox Church, the diphysite Christians in Iran succeeded in deflecting much Sasanian suspicion.\textsuperscript{46}

Despite the East Syrian depiction, in the synodical records of 410 and various other Iranian Christian texts from before the Islamic conquests, of the world as being divided, not between \textit{Rhomâyê} (Romans) and \textit{Persâyê} (Iranians), but between the “People of God” and the unbelievers.\textsuperscript{47} over the course of the Sasanian period, the diphysite Christians of Iran differentiated themselves from those co-religionists living in Roman lands or those having Western / Roman orientations (i.e. both the Orthodox and the Monophysites). In addition to distinguishing itself from the “One Church”, the East Syrian

\textsuperscript{42}Molten Moberg, “The Patriarchal See of Antioch and Seleucia / Kiesiphon: Pattern of a Development that Frightens and Inspires Today”, \textit{The Harp} 5, nos. 1-3, July 1992, p. 106.

\textsuperscript{43}Atiya, p. 253.

\textsuperscript{44}Brock, “Christians in the Sasanian Empire”, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{45}Additionally, as Schwaigert notes, the Sasanian shahs were often incited in their persecutions by the Zoroastrian clergy, who resented both the mere presence of the Christians on Zoroastrian soil (as it prevented them from fully “purifying” the natural elements of the land as part of their religious practice) and the Christians’ successes among Zoroastrian Iranians. Iranian Jews as well accused the Christians of duplicity, as they, as another minority enjoying variable favour, hoped to deflect some of the wrath of the majority from themselves (pp. 80-81). At the same time, however, it must be remembered that the “Nestorians” were not the only Christians in Iran, but that there existed a sizable Monophysite community. In fact, after monophysitism’s condemnation by the Byzantine Orthodox Church, many Monophysites from Roman Syria and Mesopotamia found refuge across the border, in addition to those captured in war and re-settled in Sasanian territory. The Diphysites and Monophysites were often rivals for the shah’s favour and were generally locked in a hostile relationship (see for example, McCullough, pp. 131, 151-154, 165).

\textsuperscript{46}In fact, the Iranian Christians were able to reverse their position in royal estimation under several shahs (including Valash, 484-88; Zamasp, 496-98; Hormizd IV, 579-90; and Kavad II, 628-643), the signs of which included the accompaniment of the Catholicos with the shah into battle against the Byzantines, as did Mar Ezekiel with Choseros I in 572 and Mar Sabarjesus I with Choseros II in 604 (McCullough, pp. 142, 149), or even in the provision of intelligence reports to the Sasanian king concerning Byzantine troop movement, as in the case of Mar Jesusyahb I to Hormizd IV (\textit{ibid}, p. 145).

\textsuperscript{47}Brock, “Christians in the Sasanian Empire”, p. 13.
Church differentiated itself on the basis of a particular theological stance, and not by blood ancestry or linguistic affiliations. The Church of the East was a “melting pot” of various peoples—ethnic Iranian, Aramean, Arab, etc.—all of whom “forgot” their pre-Christian identities, to the point that scholars are unsure as to the proportions of any one ethnic group; they all joined the one Syriac-speaking church. Common language, however, did not function as any more of a binding tie among the Syrian churches than descent or culture was among the individual members (although Syriac did come to be a characteristic of the Syrian churches) as division did emerge on the grounds of theological antagonism, which separated East Syrians (Diphysites using a Syriac rite) from West Syrians (Monophysites using a Syriac rite). As such, though it was centred within a certain geo-political entity and used a particular liturgical language, the adherents of the Church of the East built a communal identity based primarily on a particular theological confession. Nevertheless, this theologically-based identity came to represent more than pure religious affiliation, as the Church of the East was recognized by the Sasanians as representing the community in civil as well as spiritual matters. Thus, the “universal” Christian identity in the Church of the East worked to suppress other forms of association (ethnic or linguistic) and yet also to foster a communal identity that differentiated its members from other Christians, in both the spiritual and the political realm; it was, therefore, a religious, and yet more-than-religious, group identity.

Under the Muslim Arabs

In the seventh century, Islam emerged as the new force in the Middle East. In its name, the Muslims of the Arabian peninsula along with their allies swept away the Sasanian empire and greatly reduced that of the Byzantines, thereby establishing a new authority in the region and building a great

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49Although there were political benefits for the East Syrians in espousing a christology condemned by the Roman “enemy state”, this cannot be viewed as the only explanation for the adoption of diphysitism, as there continued to be a non-diphysite Christian community in Iran who would have aroused the suspicions of the authorities both before and after 431 and 451 (i.e. the Monophysites). In other words, it was not simply a concern for communal safety that pushed the majority of Christians in Iran to champion “Nestorianism”, as some continued to be associated with the Roman church until 451; and even then, it was the Orthodox who rejected the Monophysites and not the reverse.
50Brock notes that although Syriac was the primary language of the liturgy, other languages continued to be used or new ones adopted by Syrian Christians in response to the environment in which they lived, even for ecclesiastical purposes (“Christians in the Sasanian Empire”, pp. 17-18).
51Hill, p. 105; and Atiya, p. 267.
new civilization. The Arabs captured Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 637, and the Umayyad dynasty moved the Muslim capital to Damascus; Iran became a distant province in a vast empire that stretched from Afghanistan to Egypt. Although the inhabitants of the Middle East experienced a certain degree of upheaval with the arrival of the Muslims, the early response of the Syrian Christians was generally positive. The diphysite Syrian Christians, along with the Monophysites, initially heralded the conquerors’ arrival as an event of divine providence: Patriarch Isho’yahb III (d. 659), in his correspondence, declares that God gave the Arabs (Tayy) victory, describes them as “commenders of our faith”, and rejects any accusation that Arab pressure is behind Christian conversion, which he sees as a result of the laxity of the Christian clergy; Patriarch Timothy I (780-823), for his part, writes that “the Arabs are today held in great honor and esteem by God and men because they forsook idolatry and polytheism, and worshipped and honored the One God”. There is little indication, for the most part, that the Syrian Christians perceived the new rulers as practitioners of a new religion until the mid-ninth century, even among those such as Timothy I who were in close contact with the authorities. Moreover, as with other Christian communities, East Syrian legends contended that a favourable relationship had been established quite early on with the Muslims: according to tradition, Yeshuyab II met with the prophet Muhammad, who gave the Patriarch a document granting the East Syrians certain privileges, which were later confirmed by the caliphs ‘Umar and ‘Ali.

Conversion of Christians to Islam did occur, but not quickly or even regularly; rather the emergence of a Muslim majority appears to have been a slow and halting process, developing over the better part of three centuries and being more the result of a combination of the draw of the socio-

53as quoted in ibid, p. 16.
54ibid, pp. 15, 21. In order to make sense of this, it must be remembered that the Islam that emerged out of Arabia in the first half of the seventh century was not the “fully formed” Islam of later centuries, as at the time of the conquests it is likely that Islamic theology and thought had not completely solidified (Claude Cahen, “Note sur l’accueil des chrétiens d’Orient à l’Islam”, Revue de l’histoire des religions 166, 1964, p. 57). Moreover, in the course of the early expansion, there occurred the relatively large-scale conversion and assimilation of Arab tribes, most of whom probably did not grasp the details of their new faith before becoming the ruling class of the new empire.
55These legends most likely arose among non-Muslim peoples in attempts to guarantee benevolent treatment on the part of the Muslim authorities by means of establishing “historical” promises of friendship and security ostensibly given by Muslim leaders to the community in question.
56Aliya, p. 268.
economic benefits of Muslim affiliation and the lack of understanding of Islam as a religion, rather than
the product of active coercion or persecutions of any sort. The irregularity of the employment of
coercive methods, however, did not denote religious equality: the East Syrians, along with other non-
Muslim communities, were placed into the category of dhimmi, a protected people, which legally
subordinated them to Muslims and exempted them from military service, in exchange for a poll tax
(jizya). There were, in addition, various restrictions on Christians, particularly having to do with manner
of dress and public religious celebrations. Largely, however, early Islam was accepting of non-Muslims;
even as late as the eleventh century, East Syrian writers may be found extolling the tolerance of the
authorities. Furthermore, it appears that the Church of the East retained any rights and privileges with
the Muslim rulers that it had enjoyed as a community under the Sasanians.

The toleration shown on the part of the Arabs was likely due in part to the usefulness of the non-
Muslims in establishing the new regime on solid footing. As with the tax systems, the new rulers
appropriated, with only minor alterations, the administrative and bureaucratic structures in existence,
and, as such, it was expedient to retain those persons who were knowledgeable in these areas, including
the Christians. In particular, East Syrians and other Christians predominated as translators and scribes.

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57 As Ira M. Lapidus asserts, initially Islam was viewed, especially by its adherents, as the religion of the Arabs
and, thus, there was little missionary zeal (A History of Islamic Societies, 1988, rpt; Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1995, p. 43). This is not to assert that forced conversions or conscious adoption of the Muslim
faith did not occur, but rather that they were not the norm (Nehemia Levtzion, "Toward a Comparative Study of
11). In fact, the bulk of Christian conversions were accomplished in the first three centuries of Muslim rule,
during which time the Christians enjoyed relative freedom, and conversion declined after the tenth century, when
persecutions were deliberate and more frequent (Wadi Z. Haddad, "Continuity and Change in Religious
Adherence: Ninth Century Baghdad", in Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in
Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries, eds. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibrin Bikhazi, Toronto:
Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990, p. 35; and Michael G. Morony, "The Age of Conversions: A
Reassessment", in the same work, p. 135).

58 Often conversion to Islam is blamed on the levying of taxes, both the poll tax and the land tax. But as Daniel C.
Dennett discovers, the taxes exacted by the Muslims from the dhimmis were roughly equal to those paid to the
former rulers (either the Byzantines or the Sasanians). In other words, the Muslims did not increase the financial
burden placed on the populace. Instead, the taxes may have encouraged conversion in that they were now applied
to indigenous classes previously exempt from payment, namely the aristocratic and religious classes. See his full
explanation, Daniel C. Dennett, Jr., Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam, Cambridge: Harvard University

59 The restrictions placed on Christians increased over time and became much more defined under the Abbasids,
when Islamic law and the schools of jurisprudence were formalized. Even then, however, the extent of their
application depended very much on the attitude of the caliphs (Le Coz, p. 201).

60 Atiya, p. 268.

61 ibid, p. 267; Brock, “Christians in the Sasanian Empire", p. 12.

62 Lapidus, pp. 42-44.
In fact, the Syrians, both East and West, are credited with transmitting the wisdom and learning of the Greek world to the Arabs. In the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament into Syriac, Syrian scholars had worked from the Greek; this, in turn, led them to the Greek works of science, medicine, and philosophy. In the sixth century, a Sasanian medical school rose to prominence at Jundishapur (Gundeshapur or Beth Lapat), using both Iranian and Greek medical knowledge; some of its teachers were ethnic Iranians, but others were Christians, primarily East Syrians. With the arrival of the Arabs, the various works needed to be translated into Arabic, and thus the indigenous translators came to hold a place of high distinction among the authorities. The most prominent of these was Hunayn ibn Ishaq (809-873), an East Syrian Christian, who is credited with the translation of over one hundred works; more significantly, perhaps, was his ascension to head the famous translation house Bayt al-Hikma in Baghdad, established by the Abbasids. Not only as translators were the East Syrians esteemed, but additionally as physicians, acting in that role to several caliphs. In addition to the reflected prestige ascribed to the East Syrian community, the proximity of its members to the centre of power is likely to have allowed for East Syrian interests to influence the court. Moreover, as with the Sasanians, the theology of the Church of the East may have played a role in its particularly good relations with the Abbasid authorities: as Diphysites, not only were the East Syrians not associated with the perennial enemy, Byzantium, but their theology was also of a form that was perhaps more acceptable to the Muslims than other Christian theologies. For whatever reason, it appears that the Church of the East typically held an especially high place at the Abbasid court, in comparison to the other Christian denominations.

The favourable position of the East Syrians in the new Islamic empire, and the irregularity of persecution enjoyed by the dhimmis, allowed the Church of the East to reach its zenith between the eighth

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64McCullough, p. 182.
65Ibid.
66Atiya, p. 270. Moreover, Ishaq was succeeded by his son, his nephew, and other East Syrian scholars.
68Le Coz, p. 156.
69Ibid, p. 207.
70Ibid, p. 208. For example, Le Coz records that Timothy I was made head of all Christians under Abbasid rule, not simply those of his own flock.
and the tenth centuries, though it maintained an appearance of strength and activity for several centuries beyond this, even after the church had lost much of its earlier vitality. The Church of the East had sent evangelical missions to the populations neighbouring Iran by the fifth century,\textsuperscript{71} and by the first half of the seventh century, its representatives reached the court of the emperor in China.\textsuperscript{72} The Church's missionary enterprise received new vigour and direction under the Patriarch Timothy I (780-823), who inaugurated the training and commissioning of monastics and clerics specifically for evangelization.\textsuperscript{73} At its height, the Church of the East had congregations from China and Mongolia in the Far East, to the islands off the Indian sub-continent, through to Egypt and the Levant. Significant numbers of converts among the Central Asian peoples meant that when the Mongol leader Ghingiz Khan united many Turco-Mongol tribes and executed great military conquests at the beginning of the thirteenth century, there were often several Christians at any given time close to the centre of power, being found even among the households of the Great Khans.\textsuperscript{74}

Under the Muslims, East Syrian identity did not so much change as solidify. Already in Sasanian times, the denominational affiliation of the Church of the East provided a form of "religio-political" identity, as the Church was allowed to oversee both the spiritual and civil affairs of its members. After the fall of the Sasanians and the ascension of the Muslim Arabs, the Church of the East maintained its rights and privileges as the direct governing authority in the lives of its adherents. Church law ruled on ecclesiastical matters, such as sacraments, missions, monastic life, liturgy, and dogma, but equally on civil concerns, such as marriage, oaths, wills and succession, and even penal laws.\textsuperscript{75} While the Sasanians

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{71}]There are records of diphysite Christians in Arabia and an organized church from the fifth century to as late as the ninth century, though it must be remembered that Christianity in Arabia pre-dated the christological controversies (McCullough, pp. 179-180; and Atiya, pp. 258-259). Hage furthermore asserts that Christianity from Iran had begun to penetrate Central and Eastern Asia already by the third century, reaching as far as Transoxania (p. 15); though this is perhaps a bit early, it is very probable that eastern missionaries had entered into China by the late fifth or sixth century (McCullough, p. 180). Moreover, the links between the Church of the East and the St. Thomas Christians in South India are well known: though it is unclear exactly when and how Christianity spread to India, it is certain a community was in existence there by the fourth century (Atiya, p. 360). Though the Indian Church has changed its affiliation over the centuries, there has always been a remnant that has maintained the East Syrian liturgy.
\item[\textsuperscript{72}]\textit{ibid.} The East Syrian presence in China is attested to by a monument from the T'ang dynasty, apparently erected in 781 in Sian-fu, which bears inscriptions in Chinese and Syriac and which records the names of sixty-seven missionaries (\textit{ibid.}, p. 181; Atiya, p. 262; Hage, pp. 16-17).
\item[\textsuperscript{73}]Hage, 16.
\item[\textsuperscript{74}]\textit{ibid.}, p. 18.
\item[\textsuperscript{75}]Le Coz, p. 67.
\end{itemize}
had recognized the East Syrians as a more or less self-governing minority, the Muslims institutionalized
this type of state-minority relationship with the separation of all non-Muslims into the legal category of
dhimmi — "protected peoples". who were officially recognized religious communities regarded as
adhering to corrupted, but not pagan, views of God—and their representation under confessional
auspices. In essence, the organization and institutionalization of this system established what may be
viewed as "parallel" governments for the majority and minorities, though, of course, the Muslim rulers
held ultimate power.

The Decline of the Church of the East and the Mongol Invasions

Despite the relatively good terms the Christians enjoyed with the early Muslim rulers, the
detrimental effects of the conquests and the new regime gradually took their toll on the Church over the
course of a few centuries. Both the East and West Syrian Churches were accustomed to existence without
official support (in contrast to the Orthodox Church) and the necessity of self-reliance. In time, however,
the communities’ positions as dhimmis and internal divisions weakened the churches. When the Abbasids
moved the empire's capital to Baghdad in 762-766, the East Syrian Patriarch, Hananyeshu' II (744-749)
followed in 775 (though his title remained Bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon), a change that signaled an
increase of state involvement in church affairs. As had the Sasanians, the Muslim caliphs soon took on
the role of arbitrator in ecclesiastical disagreements and even director of church appointments. Isho’yahb
III, for example, required the intervention of the caliph in order to quell rebellious clergy. Ties between
the patriarchate and the caliphal throne were further strengthened by the use of the Patriarch as an
ambassadorial representative to the Byzantine court. This mutation of the patriarchs from simple
ecclesiastical leaders to "civil servants" produced great rivalries for the patriarchal throne, to the point
that corruption among candidates was often rampant. Heightening the impression that the Church of the
East was internally unstable were the frequent and aggressive arguments, accusations, and counter-
accusations between the East and West Syrians, which did nothing to promote confidence in the minds of

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76 Atiya, pp. 271-272.
77 Brock, "Syriac Views, p. 16.
78 Atiya, p. 272. The buying of episcopal votes was not at all uncommon and had, in fact, become expected.
Timothy I, after securing the throne, was faced with an angry mob of bishops when it was discovered that the
sacks placed before them, ostensibly containing bribe money, were empty.
the authorities that either community was capable of running its own affairs. Moreover, the Church as an institution was weakened by the change of regime: confiscations and pillaging, in addition to internal mismanagement, contributed to the erosion of ecclesiastical resources and wealth. Lower clergy as well did not always conduct themselves appropriately: there are many accounts of individuals who, having been passed over for promotion or deposed from their position, would convert to Islam in retaliation. In addition, by the ninth century, the Islamic character of the empire had developed and expanded, accompanied by stricter limitations on non-Muslims and more vocal hostility. The result of these forces was to encourage East Syrian Christians, as with other Christians, to convert to Islam, thereby exacerbating the erosion process and placing the Church of the East in a position of ever-increasing marginalization.

This depression of the fortunes of the Church of the East and the community of East Syrian Christians was not immediately apparent, however, despite their loss of members, but changing political fortunes soon confirmed their decline. Due to the earlier converts made in Central and East Asia, as the Mongols spread west and south into Mesopotamia and China in the thirteenth century, Christian communities were generally well treated, and the Church of the East prospered and continued to strengthen its geographical representation. The fall of the Abbasid empire, however, and the confusion that ensued were as difficult for the East Syrians as for other populations. Moreover, the apparent favour shown to the Christians by the Mongols incited Muslim resentment, and intra-Christian rivalries did nothing to cultivate the esteem of the new rulers. Eventually, for reasons left to speculation, the Mongols based in Iran accepted Islam in the thirteenth century almost in their entirety. When Ghazan (r. 1295-1304) took the Mongol throne in Iran, the fortunes of the Christians were reversed, and fierce

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79 Le Coz, p. 208.
80 Atiya, p. 272.
82 It was in the ninth to tenth centuries that the proportion of Muslims to Christians was reversed and Muslims became the majority.
83 Hage, pp. 18-19. Le Coz also notes that the rise of a Mongol Christian to the patriarchate, Yahballaha III (1281-1317), most likely aided relations between the Church of the East and the new conquerors (pp. 268-269).
84 Atiya, p. 274.
85 Hage, p. 20.
persecutions broke out, usually headed by Arabs and Kurds. But the deterioration of the East Syrian position was not yet fully realized. In 1368, the Ming dynasty ousted the Mongols from China and instituted an anti-foreign purge of the country, expelling persons, religions, and customs not Chinese in origin; as one modern author notes, the sweep was so pervasive that when Jesuit missionaries arrived in the sixteenth century, there were no immediate indications that Christianity had ever come to China. Over the course of the fifteenth century, the Central Asian peoples also abandoned Christianity, first for Buddhism and then for Islam. The greatest blow, however, came at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries: the great warrior leader Timur Lane overran Mesopotamia and Iran, the heartlands of the Church of the East, and even India and Anatolia. Timur Lane was a brutal conqueror and a Muslim, and, under him, the Church of the East was devastated: prior to the Turco-Mongol leader’s advance, the Church had lost many older congregations; but after Timur’s invasions, churches and assemblies of even large towns were obliterated. Many Christians, of all stripes, were massacred; others converted to Islam as a means of survival; and the remaining East Syrians fled to the isolated mountains of Kurdistan. The last communities in existence outside of the mountains are recorded in 1551 at Tabriz, in 1553 at Baghdad, and in Nisibis in 1556. The patriarchal throne, too, was moved from Baghdad to Maragha on the Urmian plain.

In the end, the Mongol invasions sealed the deterioration of the Church of the East as an international institution and the expulsion of its members from the centres of power in the Middle East and elsewhere. Between the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth, the once magnificent and extensive East Syrian Church lost most of its dioceses outside of the Iran / Mesopotamia region, save for the St. Thomas Christians in India, and was reduced to an isolated population in the wilds of Kurdistan. This was largely the situation in which the Church was to remain until the events of the twentieth century, for although a certain number of East Syrians did re-emerge in later centuries to establish communities on the border of the mountains to the east in the plains near Lake Urmiya and to the south in the region of Mosul, most remained in the safety of Kurdistan. As such, they largely became

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86 Atiya, p. 275.
87 Hage, p. 20.
88 ibid.
89 Atiya, p. 276.
90 ibid, p. 277.
a mountain people, surviving through pastoralism. The situation of the East Syrians, from whose ranks had risen many great thinkers and scholars of the age of the early Church, did not now support theological learning and exploration or academic pursuits of any sort;91 and thus the development of the Church of the East as a spiritual entity became somewhat stunted. It was additionally during its time based in Kurdistan that the Church of the East developed the trait of the hereditary succession of ecclesiastical offices: as priests could marry, their office was passed on to sons; and the episcopal and patriarchal offices, whose holders were celibate, were given to nephews.92 This move, which concentrated power in certain families, probably aided in the institutionalization (within the community itself and not simply in its external relations) of notions of the Church as an explicit socio-political entity, rather than a socio-religious one. Additionally, as they now lived far from the centres of administrative power, the East Syrians were increasingly governed in all aspects of life by their Church, in particular their Patriarch, giving concrete expression of the overlap of spiritual and civil authority. Moreover, the social/ethnic dimension, the conception of the “Church-as-a-people”, was furthered by the concentrated isolation of its membership: with the annihilation of most diphysite churches outside of Iran/Mesopotamia or loss of contact with those that remained, the Church of the East became associated with only one people group whose members shared, with some variances, the same language, customs, and experiences. As such, while the Sasanian and Arab Muslim devolution of administrative authority on the ecclesiastical figures of designated communities under their rule had reinforced the identity of the East Syrians as a distinct religious community, their experience of isolation in the Kurdish mountains surely served to heighten a sense of their “ethnic” political difference based on religio-political adherence.

The Sixteenth Century Schism and the Emergence of the East Syrian Uniate Church

The contention over the aforementioned issue of hereditary succession came to a head in the sixteenth century and was the apparent cause of the first serious schism in the Church of the East. On the death of the Patriarch Mar Eshuyow Shimun in 1551,93 his nephew Mar Dinkha Shimun bar Mama

91 ibid.
92 ibid, pp. 277-278. This is especially significant as hereditary succession was never a universally accepted practice and would continue to elicit controversy in the future, often with serious and long-term results.
succeeded to the throne. A number of bishops of the Church, however, "supported by a considerable section of the Nestorian community", disagreed with the appointment, for reasons not fully clear, and elected as Patriarch a monk by the name of John Sulaqa (Sulaka), who was rabban of the Hurmizd monastery. Franciscan missionaries, who had recently come into contact with the community, convinced Sulaqa that he could secure his throne by means of a powerful ally, namely Rome, and that in order to ensure Roman support he needed to make a Catholic profession of faith and gain the confirmation of the Pope. Accepting this advice, Sulaqa traveled to Rome, via Jerusalem, with letters of introduction, where he gave Catholic confession in 1553 and was ordained by Pope Julius III (r. 1550-1555). Upon his return to the Middle East, however, the Patriarch was seized by the Turkish pasha of Diyarbekr, imprisoned, and eventually killed. Nevertheless, the union with Rome was maintained by his successor, Mar Ededyeshu' (r. 1555-1567), who also received the recognition of the Roman Pope, Pius IV (r. 1559-1565). But over the reigns of subsequent Patriarchs, communication with Rome became irregular and eventually broke down; the last Catholic confession submitted was in 1670 and the next Patriarch, Mar Dinkha Shimun (1692-1700) broke all communication with the Roman Catholics, returned to the "heretical" faith, and moved the patriarchal see to Qudshanis (Kochanes) in the Hakkari mountains in Kurdistan. Except for a single attempt at reunification with the Roman Church in 1770, the Sulaqa line remained staunch in its diphysitism, and it was this line of Patriarchs, the successors of the original "defector", that became the line of the actual Church of the East.

In the meantime, however, Mar Dinkha Shimun bar Mama (r. 1552-1558?) had remained as Patriarch of his faction, based in Mosul. Later successors to his throne, however, also obtained papal recognition, probably for the same reasons that it had been sought by Sulaqa and for the purposes of

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Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 1999, p. 78: Atiya gives his name simply as Shimun bar Mama (p. 278).
94 ibid. Atiya attributes the rejection of the Shimun candidate by the bishops to loose morals on the part of Mar Dinkha Shimun. According to Le Coz, Sulaqa took the throne name of John VIII (p. 328).
95 Atiya, p. 278.
96 Atiya suggests that this occurred with the complicity of Sulaqa's rival, by whom he must mean Mar Shimun.
97 ibid.
98 Coakley, "Patriarchal List", p. 81.
99 Atiya, p. 278.
100 Coakley, "Patriarchal List", p. 79.
101 ibid; and Atiya, p. 279.
undermining the “trump card” of their rivals. Therefore, for a time, until the break with Rome by the Sulaqa line, there existed two Uniate patriarchates, one in Mosul, the other in Urmia. Unlike the Sulaqa line, however, Uniate patriarchate of Mar Dinkha Shimun remained Catholic. Eventually, to make a distinction between the two communities, Rome began referring to the “Catholic Nestorians” as “Chaldean Nestorians” in the seventeenth century and to members of the “heretical” branch as simply “Nestorians”. The “Nestorians”, however, who apparently had traditionally referred to themselves as “Syrians”, “Nestorians”, or “Chaldeans”, refused to relinquish use of the name until the nineteenth century, when the Catholic branch of the Church became organized and was officially recognized by the Ottoman Porte, thereby giving the name “Chaldean” a definite denominational meaning.

The experience of the East Syrian community during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries had at least two lasting effects: it further split the community along religious lines, and it demonstrated both the usefulness and the danger of Western contacts. The Catholic schism produced the two principal branches of the present-day East Syrian church: the Chaldeans and the “Nestorians” or Assyrians. Due to its continued contacts with the Roman Catholic Church, and, later, with Roman Catholic countries, the Chaldean community proved itself distinct from the Assyrian community, not only in terms of theology or

102 Atiya gives the initial Shimun-line Patriarchs to be confirmed as Catholic as being Mar Elias VI in 1607 and Mar Elias VII in 1657 (p. 278). Le Coz, however, writes that although several Patriarchs of this era attempted union with Rome, none produced a confession acceptable to the papacy; that other Patriarchs were willing to sign a Roman-produced confession, but only with certain reservations regarding the condemnation of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius, and the name “Mother of God” for Mary; that still others persecuted Catholic converts; and that not until 1756 did the line become uniate under Patriarch Elias XII (pp. 332-333). Additionally, according to Le Coz, the union with Rome was not without interruption, as Mar Elias XIII returned to “Nestorianism”, and only with his successor did it become Catholic again; moreover, the Shimun-line was not the sole uniate representative until the end of the third patriarchal line (see below) in 1830, thus inaugurating the present-day line of Catholic Patriarchs of the East Syrian tradition (p. 334).

103 Atiya notes that there briefly existed a third patriarchal line, also recognized by Rome and begun by the bishop of Diyarbekr in the mid-eighteenth century (p. 279). Le Coz, on the other hand, links the establishment of this third line to the move of the Sulaqa-uniate seat from Diyarbekr (ostensibly where the seat was located since Sulaqa) to Salmass, near Lake Urmia, in 1580: as the Uniates in the Ottoman regions could not be in easy contact with their Patriarch, they chose another, John, the converted “Nestorian” Metropolitan of Diyarbekr, in 1667 (pp. 329, 330). John was then recognized by the Ottomans as independent from the Church of the East and by the Latin Church as being the Patriarch of the “Nestorian” Catholic community (pp. 330-331). According to Atiya, when the Sulaqa line returned to “Nestorianism” after the short-lived attempt at Catholic reunion in 1770, this third line was abandoned by Rome and subsequently disappeared (p. 279). But Le Coz indicates a decrease of Roman support for the Diyarbekr “patriarchate” even as early as the first half of the eighteenth century (p. 331). Regardless of the details, by the first half of the nineteenth century the third patriarchal line was finished.


105 Ibid. pp. 8-9. The origins and use of the name “Chaldean”, as with “Assyrian” and “Nestorian”, is the subject of debate. See, for example, ibid, pp. 4-9.
ritual, but eventually also in terms of political orientation and historical experience. Moreover, the later history of the Chaldeans highlights the convergence of confessional and socio-political identity, as the interests and actions of the Chaldeans contrast with those of the Assyrians in several instances in the twentieth century, despite the fact that, until quite late in their history, the Chaldeans were members of the Church of the East and, therefore, shared in the outlook and identity of that community. The second “lesson” learned from the schism was that of the ramifications of relations with the West. The conflicted popular sentiments nourished by memories of the experiences of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were articulated in the nineteenth century, as many Assyrians expressed suspicion of missionaries and other Westerners as potentially divisive elements, while many others embraced the benefits of Western “friends”.106

It was as an established and well-defined religious community, then, that the Assyrians were to enter the nineteenth century. As a religious community, the Assyrians experienced a particular history that both demonstrated and reinforced their distinction from other groups, Christian and otherwise. Moreover, their distinctiveness had been re-affirmed by the powers under which they lived, in that they were governed in both civil and spiritual matters by their religious hierarchy and their Church had been bestowed with official recognition as their institutional representative. This dispensation, as well as the physical location and recent history of the Assyrians, resulted in the understanding of the boundaries of the Church of the East as being identical to the boundaries of the community itself. All of these elements of Assyrian self-understanding --religion, self-governance, communal particularity-- were to continue to play important roles in the subsequent developments of the nineteenth century and would aid in the formation of the next phase of Assyrian history.

The Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century brought significant and far-reaching changes for the Assyrians and the Church of the East, as well as to the Middle East in general. Since the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Turks were the dominant power in the Middle East, eventually stretching their empire from southeastern

106-The Chaldeans, throughout their history, received aid and support of Roman Catholic powers, most notably the Papacy and, later, France, assistance from which the Assyrians, of course, were excluded. This effectively demonstrated the tangible positive results of Western benefactors.
Europe, through Arabia and North Africa, to the western edge of Iran. The majority of Assyrians lived in Ottoman territory, as most of the Kurdistan mountains and of the Mosul plain were inside the empire's borders. Once virtually undefeatable, the Ottomans had entered into decline over the centuries, and during the nineteenth century they struggled to maintain their position in the international community and to shore up their remaining territorial possessions. Already at the beginning of the century, nationalist unrest gripped the European provinces, all of which gained independence by the dawn of the twentieth century. Although they were relatively isolated in the far northeastern corner of Anatolia, and, therefore, insulated from many of the changes in the empire, the Assyrians soon felt the repercussions of the pressures exerted on the Ottomans at the international and imperial levels.

The other portion of the Assyrian community lived in northwest Iran, primarily on the plateau of Urmiya, which was divided into a series of fertile plains and which ran parallel to the Turkish-Iranian border, bounded by the Hakkaris on the west and Lake Urmiya on the east.\(^{107}\) Iran had witnessed the rise and fall of several dynasties from the time of the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century through to the eighteenth century, when the Qajars came to the throne and established rule in Iran that was to last into the twentieth century. This stretch of time between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries brought the official adoption of a specifically Shi'i theology in Iran, which succeeded in virtually eliminating other forms of Islamic practice in the country among the vast majority of ethnic Iranians.\(^{108}\) In the political realm, nineteenth century Iran, like the Ottoman empire, was a state experiencing a certain degree of foreign involvement and influence\(^{109}\) and functioning on a rather weak centralized system, meaning that the outlying areas remained only loosely under state control, including the Azerbaijan region containing Urmiya. Also mirroring the Ottoman situation, the nineteenth century brought an increase in the degree of European penetration and intervention in Iran, which, among other ramifications, held consequences for the state's relations with its minorities, including the Assyrians.

\(^{107}\) See description in Ishaya, \textit{Role of Minorities}, pp. 43-46. The area was under Ottoman control for a time, between 1514 and 1603 (Lapidus, p. 288).

\(^{108}\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 296-299. Lapidus notes that although Shi'ism eventually broke free from state control in the seventeenth century, it had entrenched itself among the people and, therefore, remained as a very potent force in Iranian politics (pp. 300-301, 302).

\(^{109}\) See for example, \textit{Ibid}, p. 291
The Assyrians, by the nineteenth century, had moved from their origins as a purely religious denomination, international in character, to a community united in language (Syriac, though having regional variation), culture, religion, and possessing a strong historical memory spanning several centuries. Additionally, the Church of the East had remained as the institutional manifestation and representation of this group and, as such, had become virtually synonymous with a people: to say that one was an Assyrian was to claim adherence to the Church of the East, and vice versa. Moreover, the Assyrians were recognized by the powers under which they lived in the nineteenth century as a *millet* --a self-governing religious community-- which only reinforced their sense of "separateness" from other groups and "oneness" with each other.\textsuperscript{110} The concept of the *millet* had evolved over the course of Islamic rule since the seventh century, but was "perfected" under the Ottomans, though it was also in use in Iran. As governmental civil law was synonymous with Islamic law, non-Muslim communities recognized as *dhimmis* were permitted to govern their own affairs in matters concerning the personal status of their members under the *millet* system. Although in the Ottoman empire there were only two recognized Christian *millets* until the nineteenth century --the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian, the latter actually including all Christian branches outside the Orthodox Church-- the Church of the East existed as a *de facto millet* due to the distance of its members from the centres of power.\textsuperscript{111} The majority of the Assyrians living in the Kurdistan mountains in the nineteenth century were divided into autonomous clans, who were exempted from tribute to the Kurdish *amir* of the region and who had representation on the councils of the tribes (composed of Assyrian and Kurdish tribes); the rest lived under the direct authority of Assyrian *maliks* (headmen) and indirectly under the *amir*, who collected tribute from them as he saw need.\textsuperscript{112} Iranian Assyrians of the northwestern plateaus were mostly sharecroppers under Turkish overlords,\textsuperscript{113} the same was true as well for the Assyrian peasants of the Mosul plain, whether in Ottoman or Iranian

\textsuperscript{110} As Drennon notes, under the millet system an individual's political identity was derived from his or her membership in a community, rather than from place of residence (p. 195).
\textsuperscript{111} Joseph, *Modern Assyrians*, p. 60. Unlike the Chaldean head, the Assyrian Patriarch never received a *firman* from the Porte, but nevertheless represented his community to Ottoman officials in the manner of the leader of a *millet*.
\textsuperscript{113} The indigenous Muslims of the region also lived as serfs under Turkish masters (Joseph, *Modern Assyrians*, p. 62).
Assyrians on both sides of the border. However, looked to the Patriarch as their temporal leader as well as spiritual head. The Patriarch was traditionally supported by the amir of Kurdistan in his civil authority, and it was customary for both to sit in judgment over cases involving inter-religious disputes, though, by the nineteenth century, complainants tended to choose the court of one or the other, a choice remarkable in itself.

As illustrated by the collegial relations between the amir and the Patriarch, interaction between the Assyrians and the Kurds, who were the majority population in the mountainous regions, was generally amicable until the nineteenth century. Although there were certainly conflicts between the two peoples, whether on the individual or communal level, loyalties were not necessarily drawn along religious or ethnic lines. As mentioned above, the independent Assyrian tribes functioned alongside their Kurdish counterparts on the tribal councils. In fact, tribal interests often superseded other affiliations, and both Kurds and Assyrians were known to form alliances with each other for the purposes of joint ventures against their co-religionists. Kurds and Assyrians, along with other populations of the region (Chaldeans, Armenians, etc.), tended to live in mixed villages, both in Ottoman Anatolia and in Iran; though one group might predominate numerically, it was not typical to find an ethnically homogeneous village. Many authors comment on the traditionally close ties between the Kurds and the Assyrians, noting that the two communities were “almost identical” in outward forms, though not in religious practice or private life. Furthermore, the same was true of the Assyrians and Muslim Iranians living in

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114 Ishaya, Role of Minorities, p. 39. According to Ishaya, there were likewise Assyrian pastoralists living in the more mountainous regions in Iran (the Iranian continuation of the Kurdistan mountains) who had similar relationships with the Kurds as did the Ottoman Assyrians, that is, some were independent and others lived subject to outside authority.


116 ibid, pp. 61-62; Badger, p. 259-260. According to Muslim law, disputes involving a Muslim had to be brought to an exclusively Muslim court, regardless of the religion of the other party.


118 Atya, p. 282; Atya further reiterates the traditional Kurdish description of Kurdish-Assyrian relations, saying that “only a hair separated them from one another, whereas a mountain stretched out between them and the Armenians” (p. 283). Joseph, for his part, notes that when a Kurd converted to Christianity, he or she usually joined the Church of the East, and that, into the nineteenth century, there were still Assyrian villages whose language was exclusively Kurdish and Kurdish villages that remembered being Christian (Modern Assyrians, p. 61).
Azerbaijan: though they had different religious practices (and, therefore, different rites of passage, such as marriage, funerals, etc.), the two communities were “scarcely distinguishable” from each other, and both suffered equally under the exactions of the landlords.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 62-63: Ishaya, Role of Minorities, p. 64.}

Nevertheless, despite their many ties and similarities, the Muslim and Christian communities in Anatolia and Iran were not integrated entities; they were “interspersed” but not “intermingled”.\footnote{Joseph, Nestorians, p. 39; Liora Lukitz, Iraq: The Search for National Identity, London: Frank Cass. 1995. p. 72.}

Therefore, while the Muslims and Christians did often live side-by-side and share mutual interests or activities,\footnote{Joseph mentions Assyrians and Kurds inter-marrying and even converting each other, though occurrences of these were extremely rare (Nestorians, pp. 36-37). However, it was not uncommon for Kurds to pray at Christian shrines or to take their sick to a church for healing (ibid, p. 67).} they each continued to maintain themselves as distinct groups, based on perceptions of ethnoreligious difference, which were reinforced by the pattern of rule of the day, namely the legal distinction between Muslim and dhimmis.\footnote{See Albert Hourani’s comments, Minorities in the Arab World, London: Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 22.}

Religious and ethnic identity were usually related: as mentioned above, to belong to the Church of the East was to be Suryani, “Syrian”, in the same way that to be Kurd was to be Muslim; the same notion held true in the plains, where “Iranian” was synonymous with “Muslim”.\footnote{Robin E. Waterfield, Christians in Persia: Assyrians, Armenians, Roman Catholics and Protestants, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973, p. 37. As such, religious conversion usually entailed adoption of the corollary ethnicity. There was nothing new in this conception of religion and ethnicity: following the Muslim conquests in the seventh century, converts to Islam became “Arabs” (see comments in Levtzion “Comparative Study”, p. 13: and Robert Hoyland, “Introduction”, in The Seventh Century in the West Syrian Chronicles, trans. Andrew Palmer and Sebastian Brock, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993, p. xxii), and all Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans were known as “Greeks”, though non-Greeks were among them (Justin McCarthy, The Ottoman Turks: An Introductory History to 1923, New York: Longman, 1997, p. 205).}

Religious difference, therefore, carried with it conceptions of “ethnic” difference, though the actual culture and even (ancient) blood-ties between the groups may not have held to such rigid demarcations. Moreover, the perception of communal difference was fortified by the concept of al-dhimma\footnote{The principle of “protected peoples” under Islamic law.} and by the millet system of government and expanded to foster notions of ethno-political distinction. Because dhimmis were legally inferior to Muslims, there were expectations and restrictions applied to them that did not apply to Muslims, including official injunctions against non-Muslims displaying wealth or prosperity.\footnote{The enforcement of these restrictions was, of course, entirely dependent on the situation at the time, including political-economic concerns and the disposition of the ruler.} Therefore, although dhimmis regularly rose to positions of prominence under Muslim rule,
their status was never secure; in times of instability, non-Muslims, especially those viewed as having outstepped their legal confines, were the first targets for repressions and exactions. This is not to deny the contentious relationships that often existed among Muslim groups themselves, such as between the Ottomans and the Kurds in Anatolia, but rather to underscore the particular rationale employed by the Muslim powers in repressing dhimmis versus fellow Muslims. In other words, Kurds were repressed because they were troublesome, but dhimmis were repressed because they were distinct peoples--religiously, therefore legally, and therefore politically. The religio-legal separation of Muslim and non-Muslim in *al-dhimma* was carried through to the political sphere with the *millet* system, which, again, highlighted the separateness of the non-Muslims from mainstream Muslim society.127 As such, the Assyrians of the nineteenth century were imbued with a strong sense of communal identity, fostered by the structures under which they lived. This communal identity was not only maintained through subsequent political developments, but put in greater relief and strengthened.

One of the primary roots of the developments of the nineteenth century was increased European intervention in Iranian and Ottoman affairs. Already in previous centuries, the European powers, especially Britain and Russia, had become involved to a significant extent in the politics and economics of Iran and the Ottoman empire: in the seventeenth century, British, Dutch, and French companies received favourable trading privileges in Iran,128 and beginning in the eighteenth century, Russian territorial expansion was at Iranian expense. As for the Ottomans, economic capitulations favourable to the Europeans had been established earlier than in Iran, in the sixteenth century, but their significant territorial losses (to Russia) came only in the eighteenth century.129 The nineteenth century, however, brought an augmentation and intensification of European intervention, which was increasingly resented by

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127 This was to be demonstrated by the expectations of different conduct for dhimmis regarding such things as restrictions on certain forms of dress, on the riding horses, and on noise and pomp during public religious celebrations (for example, see Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, "Introduction", in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, eds. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982, pp. 5-6), as well as by the payment of the jizya.
128 Lapidus further comments that by the end of the seventeenth century, the European merchants probably controlled most of Iranian trade and consequently were the ones to reap the benefits of Iran's participation in international markets (p. 291).
129 "Significant" here means territories having a predominantly Muslim population; the Ottomans had lost territories prior to the eighteenth century, but the populations of these had remained Christian under Ottoman rule (McCarthy, pp. 196, 203). In other words, the eighteenth century losses were closer to the heartlands of the Ottomans versus peripheral provinces or subjected territories.
segments of the native populations. Iran continued to lose territory in the Caucasus to Russian advances over the course of the century and was additionally carved up into spheres of influence, the north under Russia and the south under Britain; moreover, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Qajar dynasty also gave extensive concessions to British and Russian parties, affecting control of such things as customs revenues, railway and irrigation system construction, the operation of several mines, and other important areas of civil management. As for the Ottoman empire, the well-established capitulations to European merchants not only provided Europeans with generous trade terms, to the detriment of indigenous industry, but, additionally, essentially created independent foreign entities in Ottoman territory due to the extraterritoriality enjoyed by foreigners. Furthermore, the nineteenth century was a time of rising nationalism in Europe generally, and the European provinces of the empire were no exception: virtually all lands on the European side of the Bosphorus were lost to the Ottomans by the beginning of the twentieth century.

The effect of these developments on the situation of the Assyrians in both states manifested itself in many forms. Firstly, the anti-foreign sentiments the capitulations and interferences stirred up among many Muslims also became focused on the indigenous Christian minorities living among them, as the dhimmis shared the religion of the intruders. Compounding this was the fact that indigenous Christians often received preferential treatment by the Europeans, both in terms of employment opportunities and political protection; moreover, many native Christians, once employed for European companies or embassies, were granted extraterritorial status and, therefore, enjoyed the special privileges of a foreign resident. In the Ottoman empire, Europeans additionally used the presence of non-Muslim minorities and their own citizens to exert pressure on the government to enact reforms, both political (usually regarding notions of legal equality for all citizens) and economic; these reforms, however, typically served to further European interests. In response to the interventions and expectations of the European powers.

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130 Lapidus, pp. 573-574.
131 McCarthy, pp. 202-203.
132 This perception was fostered by both Occidentals and Orientals and demonstrated by the fact that Christians (Armenians in Iran and Greeks in western Ottoman Anatolia) were usually assigned by governments to act as middlemen between local authorities and Europeans and that Europeans typically chose to employ local Christians. In other words, Middle Eastern Christians were viewed to be "cultural interpreters" by both parties (McCarthy, p. 203).
133 The Ottomans had found the empire increasingly disadvantaged in the terms of trade compared to the Europeans and had taken on a very large debt, financed by European banks, in attempts to promote industrial
as well as due to views among some segments of the native population of the need for reform, both Iran and the Ottoman empire undertook new ventures for the amelioration of their military, economic, and administrative structures along Western lines.\textsuperscript{134} In Iran, the reforms were largely ineffective, but they succeeded in strengthening anti-Western sentiments, both among the religious stratum, who opposed secularization, and among the Westernized elites and merchants and artisans, who resented being kept from the circles of power in their own country.\textsuperscript{135} The rising opposition from many fronts weakened the Qajar regime and paved the way for political unrest.\textsuperscript{136} In Ottoman Anatolia, the reforms had two principal immediate results. First, the attempts at centralization entailed an increase in the encroachment of the central authority into areas hitherto relatively untouched, including the northeastern reaches of Kurdistan. Not only did the Turks attempt to exercise their authority over the Assyrians and Kurds -- peoples accustomed to a great deal of self-direction and independence, any curtailing of which they strongly resisted -- but, in doing so, employed "divide and rule" tactics, thereby arousing and fanning hostilities between the historic neighbours.\textsuperscript{137} The second result of the Ottoman reforms was the promise, on paper, of equal rights for all subjects, regardless of religious, linguistic, or ethnic affiliation;\textsuperscript{138} these new ventures in legal equality, however, did not require the dhimmis to give up their traditional rights as per Islamic law. Although the effectiveness of these promises of equality was superficial at best, they established "double rights", in a sense, for non-Muslims in the empire; that is, the new "equality" maintained the communal privileges while stripping Muslims of their special status. As might be expected, Muslim reaction was none too favourable. In addition, popular Muslim opinion in Anatolia of

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\textsuperscript{134} The Ottoman sultans had initiated a policy of reform already in the late eighteenth century, which was to continue more or less unabated into the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{135} Lapidus, pp. 574-575.

\textsuperscript{136} ibid, pp. 575-578.

\textsuperscript{137} See for example, Wigram's comments, p. 4; and Badger, pp. 269-271, 365-366, 368-374. The nineteenth century witnessed several massacres of Assyrians, sometimes of whole villages, by Kurds or joint Kurdish-Turkish forces (see for example, Joseph, Nestorians, pp. 64, 86, 98, 116-118). The massacre of Assyrians in 1843, the first of a series led by the Kurd Badr Khan Beg of Bohtan, has been described as the worst since those under Timur Lane (Atiya, p. 284).

\textsuperscript{138} Beginning with the Gulhane in 1839, followed by the Hatt-i Humayun in 1856, and the Constitution in 1876.
non-Muslims was further worsened by the rise of secessionist nationalism in the Ottoman European provinces and the consequent hardships endured by Muslims living in those territories.

Concomitant with the expansion of European political activity, the nineteenth century was also a time of renewed Western Christian activity. The Church in the United States and Britain experienced in the eighteenth century what has been termed the "Great Awakening", a movement of new-found religious fervour. The Awakening produced widespread religious enthusiasm in those countries, with a focus on evangelization, the result being that a great number of missionary and Bible societies sprang up in the nineteenth century. Missionaries were sent across the globe with the intent of winning converts, and by the end of the nineteenth century, even the Assyrians had up to five foreign missions operating in their midst. The Roman Catholic missions, sent from France and the Papacy, had been in contact with the Assyrians since the sixteenth century, though somewhat sporadically, and their interest was to effect the re-unification of the One Church. British and American interest, on the other hand, was the product of a host of Western myths or perceptions concerning the Assyrian community. Among these were: the reputation of the Church of the East as a missionary church; the notion of the descent of the Assyrians from the two lost tribes of Israel; and the association of the modern community with the ancient Assyrians, whose artifacts were in the process of being discovered and excavated. In other words, the Assyrians were thrust to the forefront of the Western mind as a result of developments that did not directly concern the immediate situation of the community. The Western churches hoped to "revive" the Assyrian Church, in order that it might resume its evangelical efforts among its neighbours, and, except for the Anglican mission, that it might join one of their denominations.

Towards these ends, schools, seminaries, hospitals and other institutions were established by the missions among the Assyrians in Urmiya, the Hakkari region, Mosul, and elsewhere, all intended to serve the Christian communities. Among other services, Christians were able to receive a Western-style education, and some individuals were sent abroad to study. Consequently, literacy rates among the Christians were vastly improved, and Western ideas were imparted to a certain segment of their

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139 Joseph, Nestorians, pp. 44, 51, 93.
140 Joseph writes that initially it was not the intention of the American Protestant missions to establish congregations apart from the Church of the East, but that groups of Assyrian Protestants nevertheless arose as a result of exposure to the influence of the missionaries (Nestorians, pp. 76-77).
community. Moreover, the missions stimulated a revival of the Assyrians’ own language: the Roman Catholic mission in Urmiya established a printing press, though it was primarily used to produce ecclesiastical materials, and the American Protestant mission developed a written form of the Urmian dialect of Syriac, which by the end of the century was widely used in the region. These endeavours, though their impact is yet not fully known, succeeded in re-focusing the Assyrian community in terms of its self-understanding, at least as demonstrated by the publications of two particular periodicals prior to World War I. Beginning in 1848, a Protestant-sponsored periodical, Zahrira d’Bahra (“Ray of Light”) was published in Urmian Syriac, which featured articles on world news along with religious essays. Zahrira d’Bahra introduced the Assyrian community to the larger world, including the situation and relative economic advancement of Europe. Other sectarian periodicals followed: the Roman Catholic Qala d’Sllnrara (“Voice of Truth”) in 1896 and the Russian Orthodox Artmih Artridrcksyita (“Orthodox Urmiya”) by the beginning of the twentieth century. In the 1890s, following the ascension of Mar Tuma Oddo to the Chaldean episcopate in Urmiya in 1892, a man with strong inclusive sensibilities, pamphlets began to appear in Neo-Syriac extolling the Assyrian “nation”; additionally, several leaders of the community, including Mar Oddo, began to press for the adoption of the name Aturaya (“Assyrian”) for the Syrian community as a whole, rather than Suryaya, with its religious connotations. It was not long in coming until an independent (i.e. not sponsored by a denomination) periodical emerged from this new intellectual ferment: in 1906, the bi-weekly newspaper, Kukhwa (“The Star”), was published, offering its readers news items on Assyrians (in the larger non-religious sense) in the diaspora, history

141 ibid, pp. 80. 75. This “Neo-Syriac”, as it was called, did not, however, become widely used outside of the Urmiya region.
142 Naby, for his part, describes the period from the 1890s to World War I as the “strongest Assyrian cultural and economic revival of modern times”, as indicated by the plethora of publications in modern Syriac during this time (“Millat”, p. 238). This is perhaps an overly enthusiastic description, however, as it appears that the “cultural revival” impacted mainly the elites and that both educational and economic improvements were more the experience of the Urmayan Assyrians, rather than the majority Kurdistan Assyrians (for instance, there were no periodicals in the mountains, and the plainsmen appear to have been economically better off than the Assyrians in Kurdistan, according to Joseph, Modern Assyrians, p. 62, and the copious descriptions of Badger. Vol. 1).
144 ibid, pp. 8-9.
146 De Kelaita is not clear at this point whether the efforts were inclusive of East Syrians only (i.e. Assyrians and Chaldeans), or both East and West.
147 ibid, p. 9.
lessons, opinion pieces on the importance of Assyrian identity, and the need for unity across denominational lines; it would last until the end of the First World War, petering out in 1918. Although *Kukhwa* did not produce a movement of trans-denominational Assyrian solidarity, it did represent the views and orientation of the young, foreign-educated professionals in Urmia and a departure from traditional forms of identity. Moreover, though apparently the majority of East Syrians did not accept a secularized communal identity, the very availability of such ideas surely denoted a larger, if more imprecise and less radical, movement towards the strengthening of a unique sense of community. In other words, the production of periodicals advocating views revolutionary for their time probably indicated the development of a more conscious sense of community identity among a larger portion of the population. The efforts of the Western missionaries in education and literacy may be seen to have aided in the production of better defined notions of communal “difference” that underscored and even re-interpreted the boundaries of the Assyrian community.

The events of the nineteenth century, then, brought about important changes to the situation of the Assyrians. The European encroachments, both overt and masked, effected a chain reaction that soured relations between the Assyrians and the surrounding majority peoples. Interference by European powers in local affairs led to Muslim resentment (both official and popular) of minorities in general and Christians in particular, as the existence of minorities provided justification for European meddling. Moreover, the favouritism shown minorities, both in economic and political forms, by European representatives (missionaries, merchants, foreign companies, and governments) allowed the non-Muslims to transcend in many ways their traditional status as *dhimmis*, exacerbating Muslim hostility. Physical European encroachment affected those territories where the Assyrians, as well as Armenians, Kurds, Yazidis, Baha’is, and other marginalized groups, were concentrated. Due to the entrenched weak relations between the governments and the peoples of these regions, the prospect of a change in rule was typically greeted with enthusiasm or at least acquiescence by the local population, especially the Christians.

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148 *Ibid*; production of the newspaper was interrupted by the First World War in 1914, but was resumed again between 1917 and 1918. Naby, however, gives the final year of publication as 1914 (“Millat”, p. 241).

149 De Kelaita, p. 9.

150 It should be noted here that this was the outcome for many of the non-ruling groups of the region, including the Armenians, Greek Orthodox, Kurds, and others, and that the hardships experienced by the Assyrians had parallels among these peoples.
Furthermore, foreign military occupation in parts of Iran and European political support for minority rights in the Ottoman Empire fostered hopes of independence among many peoples. As a result, the loyalty of these communities was viewed, with some justification, as suspect by the authorities. The precipitous condition of the Assyrians as a Christian minority people was further eroded by worsening relations with their immediate neighbours, although this appears to have been limited to the Assyrians and Kurds in Ottoman Anatolia. The Iranian Assyrians, it seems, continued to enjoy relatively good terms with the people among whom they lived, though the Azerbaijan region as a whole became more and more of a pariah to the central government. Moreover, the more the European actions contributed to anti-Christian or anti-minority sentiments in Iran and Ottoman Anatolia, the more these peoples leaned on the European powers for deliverance from repressions and for hope of independence.

At the same time that the Assyrians were becoming increasingly isolated from and reviled by the majority societies of Iran and Ottoman Anatolia, they were strengthening their own sense of community and building the idea of a distinct future. The education brought by the missionaries did not simply ameliorate rates of literacy among the Assyrians and provided them with better opportunity for outside employment, but also offered them many tools for the foundation of a national-type consciousness. Principally, many of the missionaries were not averse to political involvement in or commentary on the situation of the Assyrians, and it is most likely that, in discussions of the Assyrian community’s future and prospects, Westerners would have imparted concepts of self-determination and nationality. Also, the various attempts by Protestant missionaries, and later by independent Assyrians, to publish materials in a vernacular Syriac --apparently the first of their kind-- illustrated the organic link between a people and its language and provided the opportunity for Syriac to be used once again for tasks other than the

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151 All of these factors were at work in the incitement of the Ottoman massacre of the Armenians between 1894-1896 (see for example, Salahi R. Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire*, Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 1993: though this work is decidedly pro-Turkish in outlook, its coverage is extensive and, therefore, one of the most complete accounts of minority-state relations in the late Ottoman empire). Many Assyrians lived in proximity to the Armenians and, therefore, suffered their fate. The treatment of the Armenians by the Ottoman authorities, moreover, did not inspire the confidence of the remaining Assyrians regarding their own future under Turkish rule.

152 Perhaps the greatest “Westernizing” influence of the mission schools was the, often early, instruction of a European language (the choice depending on the country of the mission’s origin) alongside, or sometimes even preceding, instruction in modern vernacular Syriac (Naby, “Millat”, pp. 239-240).

153 At least as indicated by the materials consulted for this paper.
Moreover, the content of the periodicals and the newspapers published concerned only Assyrians (regardless of how “Assyrian” was defined), not “Christians” or “Urmiyans”, and thus focused the attention of Assyrians on persons and groups identified as part of the unique Assyrian entity. The sense of who the Assyrians were as a historic group was also given re-inforcement by the missionaries, as they were responsible for popularizing the name “Assyrian”, along with its corollary ancient connotations, to describe the members of the Church of the East—who had hitherto been referred to as “Nestorians”—in the Western world. The missionaries, however, did not directly promote any secularized or language/ancestry based notions of peoplehood among the Assyrians, as they gave tacit support to the role of the Patriarch as the head of the whole community in all matters, treating him and not tribal leaders, as the ultimate authority. At first glance, the situation of the Assyrians may appear to have changed little over the course of the nineteenth century, but, in fact, this century laid the foundation for the radical developments that were subsequently to unfold. For, the experiences of the Assyrian community in the nineteenth century demonstrated to them that they were not part of the mainstream Iranian and Ottoman societies, but, conversely, encouraged them in their solidifying orientation on Europe and sense of unique communal identity, which, for the majority, was still very much conceived of along traditional, that is, denominational, lines.

154 At the same time, however, it must be noted that the various missions did not co-operate regarding the transliteration of the vernacular Syriac, and so each used its own version in its publications. As such, the periodicals were not a unifying force in terms of facilitating a broad exchange of ideas or cohesive literacy. As Naby notes, this was due to the purpose of the sectarian publications, which was to disseminate information regarding the particular denominations (“Millat”, p. 242).

155 As previously mentioned, the original designation of “Nestorians” as “Assyrians” is unclear (that is, who and when), and authors take various positions on this matter. Regarding the popularization of the name “Assyrian” in Europe and North America, however, the effect of the reports, memoirs, and testimonies of the missionaries is without parallel.
Chapter Three: Movements of the Early Twentieth Century: Revolutions and World War I

The early decades of the twentieth century brought experimentation with new ideas and with new political forms to much of the Middle East. The Young Turk Revolution in Turkey and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran heralded the beginning of the end of the old categorizations of society and the large-scale introduction of more nationalistic-type conceptualizations of the state and "the people". Though the Assyrians were less involved in both these movements than many of their compatriots, including other Christians, the changes wrought by the revolutions, and the subsequent events they made possible, certainly impacted the Assyrians, despite their isolation, and prepared the soil for the dissemination of ideas regarding their identity following the First World War. World War I had a momentous effect on the Assyrians, including their flight from their traditional homelands, the loss of material possessions and a significant percentage of their population, and their refugeehood in the newly established mandate of Iraq. Moreover, the legacy of the preceding century (socio-politico-economic; relations with European powers; etc.) combined with the lessons of "the Great War" shaped the context of relations between the Assyrians and the new states in the Middle East as well as the outlook and self-identification of the Assyrians themselves.

The Young Turk Revolution and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution

As indicated previously, the nineteenth century had been a period of vigorous, if somewhat ineffective, reforms in the Ottoman Empire. Among those measures that bore fruit, however, were the (largely military) schools that were intended to modernize the army and the administration and which indeed produced a cadre of young men educated along European lines. A certain number of these, concentrated in the military, feared the obvious threats to the security and integrity of the Empire and questioned the appropriateness of the Sultan's autocratic rule. Certain officers, known as the "Young Turks", became convinced of the need for a change of regime. When they were "adopted" by the clandestine Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), numerical and organizational strength were joined with ideological and political articulation and the Young Turk rebellion was born. Sultan Abdülhamid

2Lewis, p. 208.
(1876-1908) resisted for a time, but eventually bowed to pressure and capitulated to the Young Turks' demands to restore the Ottoman Constitution. The success of the rebellion initiated "an almost delirious joy", not only among Muslims, but Christians as well, and prompted not a few reconciliations and embraces across the confessional divides. The heady anticipation that rose with the Revolution, however, was soon disappointed. The true constitutionalists were too few and too weak, and soon the CUP, as the dominant (and soon the sole) party in the government, ruled as heavy-handedly as had the Sultan. Though ousted from power for a brief period, the CUP eventually gained full control over the army, police, and government offices and ruled from 1913 to 1918 essentially as a military dictatorship, though with the Sultan as a monarchical figure-head.

Although it mimicked in many aspects the previous monarchical rule --for example, in the squashing of any real political opposition-- the CUP also departed from the established path: training schools for local gendarmeries were extended to new areas of the Empire; a new system of secular primary and secondary schools, teacher training colleges, and other higher education institutions (including the University of Istanbul) was founded; the Westernization of time-keeping (adopting the European 24-hour clock), costume, and manners was implemented; and provincial and local administrations were reformed. The single most significant development during the era of CUP government, however, was perhaps in the field of intellectual debate and orientation. Owing to the concerns at the heart of the Revolution, namely the preservation of the Empire, and the new freedoms granted with the end of autocratic rule, the immediate aftermath of the Young Turk initiative saw the rise of many periodicals and newspapers in which discussions regarding such questions as the role and form of religion, nationality, freedom, loyalty, and identity abounded. Until the Young Turk period, the dominant articulations of identity among Ottoman Turks had been Islam and Ottomanism. According to Islamic perspective, the world was divided into three categories of people: believers, unbelievers, and dhimmis ("corrupted believers", as it might be understood, living under Muslim rule): religious affiliation,

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4Lewis, p. 225.
5ibid, pp. 228-229.
6ibid, p. 213; as David Kushner underscores, the inspiration for this questioning lay with the Turkish intellectuals of the preceding century, who had been heavily influenced by several sources, including European Orientalist scholarship (The Rise of Turkish Nationalism 1876-1908, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1977).
therefore, was to surpass economic, social, and political distinctions. During the period of the Tanzimat reforms beginning in the nineteenth century, the government realized the benefit of a common identity and thus promoted Ottomanism: loyalty to the Empire based on a sense of Ottoman citizenship and participation in an “Ottoman nation”. As such, among Ottoman Turks there existed little sense of Turkish identity. Although discussion on the identity of the Turks and their role in history and the Ottoman Empire had emerged in the previous century, it was not until the Young Turk Revolution that such notions became topics in the public realm and gained a certain degree of acceptance at official levels. For, despite the affirmation of the Young Turks and of the CUP of their commitment to Ottomanism, in reality, once in power, a process of subtle Turkification began, including the imposition of the Turkish language and an increase in pan-Turkish cultural and political activities. Though not the developed Turkish nationalism that was to emerge under the Turkish Republic, the gradual re-orientation of a wider segment of the Turkish population away from the traditional, inclusive notions of identity to one that emphasized the particular and “ethnic” elements of identity certainly paved the way for the bolder steps of Mustafa Kemal.

In Iran a similar movement was underway, though with significant differences. As in the case of the Ottomans, many young intellectuals in Iran were worried by the extent of foreign interference in the operations of their government and by the lack of accountability to the country's inhabitants. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the rise of many political and cultural societies, often influenced by Western liberalism, which debated proposals for reform of the country and theories of constitutional government. The membership of these societies cut across ethnic and religious lines. and branches were found in the important centres of Tehran and Tabriz (capital of the province of Azerbaijan)

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7Lewis, pp. 328-329.
8Kushner, p. 3. Sultan Abdülhamid reinvigorated an identity based on Islam and actually made Islamism, as it was called, an active part of his political program (ibid, p. 4).
9Lewis, pp. 330-332; Kushner, pp. 1-2. Kushner notes that while Europeans commonly employed the word “Turk”, it was not at all a common appellation among Ottoman writers and was primarily used to designate “the ignorant nomad or peasant of Anatolia, often with a definite derogatory connotation, or else to distinguish between a Turkish-speaking Ottoman and those who spoke other languages” (p. 2).
10ibid, p. 6; Lewis, pp. 219, 348-350.
11Richard Cottam identifies the tobacco concession given to Britain in 1890 as the turning point in Iranian political awareness and participation: whereas previous concessions did not elicit much popular response, the Iranian public was very much involved in the repeal of the 1890 concession. He also notes, however, that this was less a demonstration of nationalistic fervour than an outworking of practical and religious concerns. Richard W. Cottam, Nationalism in Iran, 1964; rpt. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979, pp. 12-14.
and throughout the north and south of Iran. The 1905 Russian Revolution provided the inspiration for the application of democratic ideals and for the achievement of an end to foreign domination. Activities with nationalistic overtones led to the arrest and exile of several nationalist leaders in the summer of 1906; as the conflict developed into open confrontation with government forces, the religious sector joined on the side of the rebels. The result was that, for the first time, the slogan of “Long live Islam” was accompanied by the new slogan, “Long live the nation of Iran”, signifying a shift from the traditional identities based on region, ethnicity, or religion. The Shah finally bowed to public pressure and in August 1906 issued a royal proclamation granting the organization of a majlis (parliament). However, the variegated coalition of intellectuals, students, clerics, and merchants that had accomplished the Constitutional Revolution, and which dominated the seats of the Majlis, soon demonstrated its many areas of divergence. Moreover, foreign encroachment took advantage of the weak, inexperienced government: Russia occupied regions in the north, while Britain sent in imperial troops to guard its nationals in Iran, and both pressed for the granting of more concessions. In December 1911, the second Majlis was suspended and absolute rule of the Shah reinstated, thus ending Iran’s Constitutional Revolution.

Though it lasted only five years, the Revolution in Iran accomplished several things with lasting significance. Among other aspects, one author describes the period as being the formative years for Iranian nationalist identity. As in the Ottoman Empire, contact with Western imperialism and Western national/racial theories spawned new questions in Iran regarding modes of government and forms of identity. As part of the nineteenth century Western Orientalist trend of exploring and documenting “exotic” cultures and their histories, a body of literature on what was deemed to be “Persian” history

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13 *ibid*, pp. 37-38.
14 *ibid*, pp. 53-54.
15 *ibid*, p. 54. See also Ervand Abrahamian’s comments on Iran’s communal fragmentation in *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 32-35.
16 Afary notes this was a feature particularly of the second Constitutional period, after the constitutionalists succeeded in regaining power, having been ousted briefly in 1908 by forces supportive of the Shah (pp. 227, 282).
17 *ibid*, p. 311; Cottam, pp. 17, 18.
18 Cottam, p. 17.
19 The legacy of Western Orientalism is a topic of controversy, for, although the scholarly movement did research and disseminate much detailed information regarding Eastern histories, the theoretical basis of Orientalism was found in the racial theories prominent in European thought at the time; as such, the categories and conclusions
was produced by Europeans. By the turn of the twentieth century, Iranians had adopted the methodologies, methods, and even content of the Orientalist movement in writing their own history, lexicons, etc.\(^{20}\) This entailed both an exchange of the traditional “chronicling” focus of history writing (i.e. the day-to-day activities of the court) for a new-found focus on “Iranian” history and the internalization of the view of the “Iranian entity” as a people, a language, a geo-political territory, and a civilization, where no such notion had existed before.\(^{21}\) During the final decades of Qajar reign, therefore, there developed a “vague nationalistic sentiment” combined with religious fervour opposing Iran’s submission to foreign influence.\(^{22}\) It was not until the Constitutional Revolution, however, that the idea of Iran as a “nation” came to the forefront of elite parlance. In the early period of the Constitutional period, political organizations and radical newspapers formed throughout Iran,\(^{23}\) and even after 1911 many journals, newspapers, and textbooks paid homage to the ancient “Iranian nation”.\(^{24}\) Therefore, although the nationalism of the liberal constitutionalists was more territorial than ethnic in base,\(^{25}\) their relatively short-lived movement signaled the dawn of a new trajectory for concepts of identity that would be capitalized upon by the subsequent regime of Reza Shah.

Both the Young Turk Revolution and the Constitutional Revolution of Iran focused latent tendencies of the nineteenth century, as concerned new ideas on history, religion, government, and identity, and gave them structural manifestation. As regards the participation of the Assyrian community in these momentous events, there is no available evidence to indicate any Assyrians were involved in the Young Turk Revolution or the constitutional government that followed, and they demonstrated only limited involvement in the Iranian Majlis during this period. This is not indicative of the general level of promoted by Orientalist literature served to promote Western perceptions of the East versus the views of the Eastern peoples regarding themselves.

\(^{20}\) Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity*, New York: Paragon House, 1993, pp. 151, 155. Contact with the West also introduced notions of individual rights, liberalism, nationalism, and socialism to the educated segments of Iranian society (Abrahamian, pp. 50-51).

\(^{21}\) Vaziri, pp. 94, 99-113.

\(^{22}\) *ibid*, p. 184.

\(^{23}\) Abrahamian, pp. 86-87.

\(^{24}\) Vaziri, pp. 186-187.

\(^{25}\) *ibid*, p. 185. The clerical elements, for their part, tended to oppose any other base of identity and social organization other than one based on Islam and a certain notion of Islamism. In addition, though many of the constitutionalists advocated equality for all, regardless of ethnicity or religion, the Iranian language was made paramount in the Majlis and the ability to read, write, and speak it was a requirement (among others) for all deputies (Afary, p. 87).
activity among minorities in these movements, as Jews, Baha’is, Azali Babis, and particularly Armenians were much more in evidence, especially in the Iranian revolution. The Assyrians, however, were much more isolated than many other communities, as they were mountain dwellers in Anatolia and largely village agriculturalists in Iran. Nevertheless, the two revolutions were not episodes of mere political upheaval, but events that marked the onset of a change in widespread communal identities and rationales for governments and their policies. Furthermore, the Young Turk Revolution and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution demonstrated the articulation of nationalistic theories in a Middle Eastern context, thereby providing intellectual “food for thought”, as well as practical examples of nationalism at work. As such, despite their apparent lack of widespread participation in the creation and establishment of the revolutions in question, the implementation of the revolutions were bound to affect the Assyrians and their own developing sense of nationalistic identity, in the following two ways at least.

Firstly, the revolutions most likely continued the push of the Assyrians to the margins of the societies in which they lived. In Ottoman territory, the subtle rise of a Turkish-centred nationalism forced all other communities, including the Assyrians, to assume the role of “other” in the primary identity of the Empire (a trend which would be fully realized in the Turkish Republic). In Iran, though a “Persian” (and therefore Shi’i Muslim) identity was favoured, the Constitutional Revolution did seek legal equality among the various peoples of the country, and so the augmentation of tension between the Assyrians and the state was not due (at this time) to a nascent exclusionist nationalism. Rather, the continuing disaffection of the Assyrians in Iran was more likely due to the role of the province of Azerbaijan. where the Assyrians were largely concentrated, in the revolt against the Shah. Tabriz was among the most radical of the revolutionary centres, and this characteristic, combined with the region’s strategic importance to Russia, meant that Azerbaijan received a great deal of attention during anti-constitutionalist and reactionary endeavours. This entailed much upheaval in the area, especially as a result of the Russian occupation during the period of the second Majlis and the subsequent massacres in Tabriz and execution of prominent constitutionalists in 1912. Although the Assyrians may not have been

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26Afary makes many mentions of the often very liberal and very diverse elements at work in Tabriz and, therefore, Azerbaijan as a whole, as well as the enthusiasm with which the province participated in revolutionary structures. For example, see pp. 75, 78-79, 88, 227.
directly implicated in the punitive events, the uncertainty, disruption, and civil confusion must have impinged upon their security as well.

The second manner in which the revolutions would have impacted the Assyrians was in the realm of identity and political theory. Again, due to their peripheral existence in the mountains of Kurdistan, the Assyrians in Ottoman territory were probably little influenced in a direct manner by the ideals and ideology of the Young Turk rebellion and the ensuing “Turco-centric” rule of the CUP. Nevertheless, any “whiffs” of the new attitudes of the central government, especially as reflected in official structures and policies, combined with the continuing influence of Western missionaries, who themselves were imbued with notions of nationalism and racial theories (long-established by this time in European thought), might have provided fodder for some Assyrians, particularly the Patriarchal family, who were the primary official contacts of the community. Moreover, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the developmental period of nationalism among the closest neighbours to the Assyrians, the Kurds. By 1908, Kurdish nationalism had spread even into the provinces and towns outside of Istanbul, though often in forms different than those advocated by the intellectuals and urban-based elites. Unlike the Young Turk Revolution, which was centred in Istanbul and western Anatolia, far from the regions inhabited by the Ottoman Assyrians, the Iranian revolution brought constitutional forms and government, along with political debate and discussion, to the provinces. As mentioned above, the Tabriz provincial anjuman (the local governing council that provided a direct link to the Majlis in Tehran) was the largest and most influential of its kind. In addition, most towns and cities in the north and west areas of Iran saw the organization of popular (i.e. non-official) anjumans that agitated for issues specifically of concern to the non-urban population. Some anjumans were even organized along trade or ethnic lines, thereby giving voice to certain communities within a larger population. In fact, the Tabriz anjuman was a particular

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27 Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989. Olson particularly mentions the role of the new military schools in the fostering of a new sense of Kurdish “nation-ness” among Kurdish officers in the Ottoman army (p. 12), as well as the establishment of Kurdish nationalist organizations immediately after the 1908 revolution (p. 15).
28 *ibid*, p. 16. The rapid acceptance of Kurdish nationalism among the rural masses was due to its transmission by the Kurdish religious leaders via the systems of tarikats and tekkiyes (*ibid*, pp. 16-17).
29 Afary, p. 75.
30 *ibid*, pp. 74, 175. Afary notes that these councils were typically opposed to by the Majlis and local authorities (pp. 174-175).
31 *ibid*, p. 75.
example of the inter-communal character of participation in the revolution, as it was located in the Armenian quarter of the city and was visited regularly by Armenians. Furthermore, the 1907 supplement to the 1906 Iranian constitution granted the Assyrians and Chaldeans together the right to send one delegate to the central Majlis, as was the prerogative of the Armenians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Although no delegate was ever sent by the Assyro-Chaldean community, apparently due to denominationally-inspired rivalries, the choice and manner of selection of a delegate was a topic of intense debate in Urmia. Therefore, though there is no known Assyrian anjuman from this period or specific mention of Assyrian participation in the communally-mixed local anjumans, the widespread nature of the Constitutional Revolution, regardless of how well it was understood by its illiterate participants, suggests that the questions, ideas, and dilemmas of the revolution were available to the intellectuals among the Assyrians, whose existence is demonstrated by the afore-mentioned mission journals and the one independent journal, Kukhva, in Urmiya. In fact, one author points to the generally liberal atmosphere in the country at this time, along with the concomitant weakened central authority and increased European interventions, as contributing factors to manifestations of non-sectarian, secular Assyrian unity (including in the larger, more inclusive sense) during this period. As such, despite their low levels of direct participation in the revolutions of the Ottoman Empire and Iran, the Assyrians of both these countries, particularly those of Iran, were sure to have been exposed, if perhaps only in a vague way, to the notions of nationalism and the ethnic/racial theories that accompanied the rise and establishment of the new revolutionary regimes, as well as to have witnessed the implementation of these ideas (which, until this time for the Assyrians, would have existed only as abstract words from European missionaries and officials) in real and practical ways in an Eastern context. Thus, the revolutions would have worked to

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32 *ibid.*, p. 78. Moreover, both Armenians and Muslims (Shi'i Azerbijanis and Sunni Kurds) were essential in establishing the revolution in Tabriz, demonstrating a great co-operation among traditionally hostile communities (pp. 78-79). This was not the case in all areas, however, as some anjumans were controlled by conservative 'ulama or anti-constitutionalist governors; in Isfahan, Kashan, and Shiraz, for example, both the Jewish and the Chaldean communities succumbed to the harassment and emigrated out of the country (pp. 77-78).

33 Naby, "Millat", p. 245.

34 See *ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

35 *ibid.*, p. 242.

36 Those Assyrians who had migrated to the Caucasus regions for work were more likely to have witnessed nationalist stirrings among the peoples inhabiting those areas, such as the Armenians; De Kelaita offers Dr. Fraidoon Bet-Oraham as an example of an Assyrian who, having been inspired by eastern European / Caucasian
further encourage the Assyrians to consider their own role and situation in the societies in which they lived, in terms of stimulating reflection both on their own unique identity and the evidencing of strong identities of the other populations among whom they lived. At this point, however, any evidence of an Assyrian national identity as defined in this paper was, at best, limited to a small number of intellectual elites. An important factor impeding the spread of a nationalistic identity was the lack of contact among the members of the geographically-dispersed community, particularly the isolation of the mountaineers, who comprised the majority of the Assyrians. But subsequent events would offer new possibilities for intra-communal contact and, therefore, for the rise of a larger (and different) sense of community identity.

**World War I**

The First World War, often thought of as a European event, held far-reaching consequences for the peoples of the Middle East. The region as a whole became a theatre into which the European rivalries and conflicts were extended, and its peoples were duly drawn into the melee. For the Assyrians, as for many other communities, including the Armenians, the war was catastrophic. In Anatolia, when the Ottoman Empire officially joined the war on the side of the Central Powers, the Sultan, who also held the position of Caliph (the “successor” to the prophet Muhammad, i.e. the earthly “head” of all Muslims, theoretically at least), declared a *jihad* against the Allied powers and their supporters. While the declaration did not produce the universal Muslim commitment to the Empire and the struggle against its enemies as was hoped, it did provide a pretext for the harassment and abuse of non-Muslims for those who so desired. Therefore, despite the efforts of some individuals, both Muslim and Christian, to protect those of a different confession --even hiding neighbours in their own homes or taking up arms to defend them-- the atmosphere was laden with religiously-charged sensibilities. The Assyrians, furthermore, in

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37 De Kelaita notes that it is virtually impossible to assess the impact of nationalist thinking among the Assyrians at the popular level, though evidence points to nationalistic-type endeavours at least among the intellectuals in Urmiya (p. 15).

38 *Meaning “holy struggle”. Jihad is very important in Islam and is often considered to be a “sixth pillar” of the faith; though it is typically equated by Westerners with armed ventures, jihad means any battle against evil, including (and, some would say, especially) against evil in one’s own person.*

39 Al-Rasheed, p. 45.

1915, decided to join the war on the side of the Allies, due to the insecurity of their position under Ottoman rule and the apparent support and promises offered to them by the European powers; this put the community in direct conflict with the Ottoman forces.\(^{41}\) In October of that same year, the Assyrian mountaineers, having endured heavy losses, were driven by Turkish and Kurdish forces out of the Hakkaris and into Iranian territory; there they were assisted by the Russian army, still occupying Azerbaijan, and their Iranian brethren.\(^{42}\) Due to Iran's inability to enforce its official stance of neutrality in the war\(^ {43}\) and to the animosity between the Christians and the Muslims of the northwest of the country - a product of the favouritism shown to the Christians by the occupying Russian force and the reversal of traditional Muslim-Christian roles that it brought -\(^ {44}\) Iran did not remain a haven for the Assyrians. They were pushed out of the region, following the withdrawal of the Russian forces from Iran after the Russian Revolution of 1917, and eventually met with the British forces stationed in upper Mesopotamia, taking refuge at Baquba, located north of Baghdad. Shortly thereafter, in March of 1918, the Assyrian Patriarch, Mar Benyamin Shimun, was killed by the Kurdish chief Simko (Simco) when the latter invited the Patriarch to meet, ostensibly to conduct peace negotiations. In all, it is estimated that the Assyrians lost at least one third of their population over the course of the war, as a result of their participation in the war effort, massacre, starvation, and exposure.\(^ {45}\) Intensifying their sense of loss, the Treaty of Sèvres.

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Editions, 1983, p. 69; Yonan H. Shahbaz, *The Rage of Islam: An Account of the Massacre of Christians by the Turks in Persia*, Philadelphia: The Roger Williams Press, 1918, pp. 96, 113, 134. The single most horrific outcome of the confessional hostilities during the war years may be considered to be the large-scale massacre, categorized as a genocide by many, of the Ottoman Armenian population.

\(^{41}\) Surma D'Bait, pp. 70-71.


\(^{43}\) The weakness of Iran's central government during this time meant that, in addition to Russia and Britain occupying the northern and southern portions of the country to protect their own interest, Ottoman forces also freely crossed the border to make continuing incursions against the Assyrians (Surma D'Bait, pp. 76-77; Abrahamian, p. 103).

\(^{44}\) For example, Shahbaz reports that the Christian inhabitants of the area became landowners shortly after the arrival of the Russians (pp. 41-42), and Coakley reprints a missionary's note that "many Syrians have built for themselves large and imposing houses... they ride in carriages.... everywhere there are signs of increasing comfort and luxury" (J.F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England: A History of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 318).

concluded by the European and Ottoman protagonists in 1920, gave nothing to the Assyrians, despite the many promises they had received from Britain over the course of the war regarding the creation of a homeland or Assyrian autonomous region. Instead, the powers of the day determined that the Assyrians should be settled—the "where" and "how" to be determined later—as a part of the new states created by the treaty. Therefore, the end of World War I found the Assyrians grouped in the new state of Iraq, living as refugees under British auspices.

At Baquba, the Assyrians were collected in a refugee camp. There, the Iranian and Ottoman Assyrians, plainspeople and mountaineers, intermingled, as the villages and tribal groups, formerly separated by geographic distance and way of life, were forced to co-habit. Now grouped at Baquba, they became aware of the extent of their community and of the similarities in language, culture, and religious practice. Moreover, as a unit they had suffered massacre, disease, and dislocation and had together struggled for survival; these experiences provided the Assyrians with a new shared historical memory. The memories of the suffering undergone during the war was encapsulated in tales and folk songs, thereby preserving the memory for future generations and forging it into the Assyrian sense of self; one author refers to this process as the birth of a new culture. The Assyrians realized the commonalties not only among the members of their own community, but also with those of other Syrian communities. Inter-tribal and even inter-denominational marriages were concluded following the war, and, as inter-denominational church services had been held during the period of "siege" in Urmia, it is possible that they also continued under the cramped conditions at Baquba. A further instigating factor in the dissemination of a "national"-type identity among a larger proportion of the Assyrian community may have been the widespread repetition of US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, which outlined the "right" of self-determination. Already by 1919, this concept had expanded into even remote

46Mountaineers and plains dwellers differed in dialect, clothing, and lifestyle, and they entrenched these differences through a preference for endogamy, although some migration from the mountains to the plains and the pilgrimage of plainspeople to the mountain shrines prevented their total isolation one from another. Nevertheless, the mountaineers were considered to be rough and crude by the peasants of the plains (Ishaya, *Role of Minorities*, p. 41).
47Al-Rasheed, p. 47; De Kelaita, p. 16.
48Al-Rasheed, p. 47.
49De Kelaita, p. 16.
50ibid.
51Shabbaz, p. 119.
communities, including the Bedouin of southern Mesopotamia and the nomadic tribes of Kurdistan. The possibility that the Wilsonian ideals reached the Assyrians is, therefore, very likely, especially considering their near-constant association with European forces throughout the war period.

Nevertheless, the novel sense of extended commonality fostered by the refugee experience did not translate into a widespread nationalistic unity. The general sentiment shared among the Assyrians at Baquba was a desire to return separately to their own homes, the mountaineers to the Hakkaris and the Urmiyans to the plains of Iran. It was largely with this goal in mind that several delegations were sent to the Paris peace conference in 1919 to represent Assyrian and Chaldean concerns. Various petitions were presented to the conference: one from the Urmiyan community; another from Assyrians who had emigrated to the Caucasus regions during the Russian withdrawal from Iran; still another from the Assyrian National Association of America; and also representatives apparently of both the Chaldean and Assyrian Patriarchs. Information regarding the content of the petitions is uneven, though it seems that while the Chaldean Patriarch requested a united homeland incorporating the Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Syrian Orthodox, the Assyrian Patriarch petitioned for the creation of an Assyrian region under foreign protection (within the area of Mosul-Jazira-Bashqala-Urmiya) for only his own flock. Both the Patriarchal petitions, however, along with that of the Urmiyan Assyrians, were appeals for a return to life essentially as it was before the disruptions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, rather than for the establishment of a state based on nationalistic claims. Moreover, the Urmiyan petition was reflective of the general plainspeople-mountaineer split extant in the Assyrian community: both saw their preservation as dependent on their return to their separate homes and did not identify their future with that of the other. The only petition to offer a nationalistic-type vision was that of the American Assyrians, which called for the establishment of a mandate in northern Mesopotamia, with access to the Mediterranean, for the purposes of forming an Assyrian state; this claim was based on the "sacred and inherent right of

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53 Al-Rasheed, p. 46.
54 More will be said below about this organization and the Assyrian diaspora.
58 *ibid*, pp. 152-153.
mankind” to self-determination and the “eternal deed” the Assyrians held to the land of Mesopotamia.\(^5^9\) Furthermore, this petition defined the Assyrians as the peoples traditionally known as Nestorians, Chaldeans, Jacobites, and Maronites; it also allows for the inclusion of “Islamic Assyrians”, which were certain Kurdish tribes, Yazidis, and unspecified “others”.\(^6^0\) Despite the obvious inclusive and nationalistic character of the petition of the Assyrian National Association, it was, nevertheless a petition from Assyrians now residing outside the Middle East and was clearly not in keeping with the pervasive sentiments held by the Assyrians of the “old countries”. Therefore, although the Assyrians demonstrated unity in their common goal of returning to their homelands, the variety exhibited via the petitions spoke to the lingering intra-communal divisions that continued to separate the community along regional and ideological lines.

The First World War brought changes not only for the Assyrian community as a whole, but also specifically for its ecclesiastical hierarchy and the Church of the East. As described in the previous chapter, the Church of the East was central in the Assyrians’ definition of their community and its self-identity. Perhaps as a consequence, or perhaps as an explanation, the Patriarch, as the leader of the church, also exercised temporal leadership over the community and was recognized as its head by all Assyrians, regardless of where they lived, and by authorities outside the community. Thus the Patriarch played the intertwined role of Patriarch and Prince,\(^6^1\) which may be demonstrated by the judiciary and mediating powers wielded by the Patriarch, even in matters concerning Kurds.\(^6^2\) In fact, the canon law of the Church of the East, the *Sunhadas*, also fulfilled the role of civil law, thereby governing all aspects of life for the Assyrian community. The other members of the religious hierarchy, too, formed part of the traditional leadership of the towns and villages,\(^6^3\) and during the war, the priests, bishops, as well as the Patriarch, were among the “generals” of the Assyrian forces. Due to this form of participation, as well as

\(^5^9\) As reproduced in Dadesho, p. 64. The petition also makes reference to the effort and loyalty demonstrated by the Assyrians in the war effort and the numbers lost, elements typical of all the Assyrian petitions.

\(^6^0\) *Ibid*, pp. 62-64. Interestingly, the conclusion of the petition ends with the following: “These claims are in perfect accord with the wishes of Mar Shimon and men of war [sic] and the leaders of the Assyrian nation as expressed through the cables transmitted through the department of State [sic] in Washington to the President of the Assyrian National Association of America” (p. 68).

\(^6^1\) *Surma D’Bait*, p. 53. Ishaya describes the Patriarch’s control over the Hakkari region as being one approximating a tributary principality (*Role of Minorities*, p. 37).

\(^6^2\) As mentioned previously, and in *Surma D’Bait*, pp. 56, 60-63; *Ishaya, Role of Minorities*, pp. 39-40.

\(^6^3\) In fact, Ishaya records that the priest held the most prestigious position in the villages (*Role of Minorities*, p. 56).
the widespread devastation on all inhabitants of the region, the ecclesiastical membership of the church was decimated by the end of the war. The Church of the East had lost the greater number of its priests and was left only six bishops, including the Patriarch. Moreover, of these six bishops, four demonstrated stormy relations with the patriarchal family. As for the Patriarchate itself, it had recently become the focus of controversy, when in 1920 Mar Eshai Shimun was consecrated at the age of eleven, following the death of his uncle Mar Polos Shimun, the successor to the murdered Mar Benyamin. Further heightening dissatisfaction, Mar Eshai soon departed for Britain to receive his education, leaving his aunt Surma to act as head of the Patriarchate, and she too was absent for a year or more following the end of the war as she attempted to plead the Assyrians’ case at the peace conference.

As such, at the end of World War I the Church of the East found itself in a great state of disorganization and confusion and the position of the house of the Patriarch weakened, due to the physical absence of its leaders. and, therefore, subject to a certain degree of criticism from the community. The leadership vacuum permitted the rise of lay leadership figures. This is not to suggest that opposition to the Patriarchal family had not existed before or that tribal leaders did not also play important roles in the heading of the community, but rather to propose that the absence of church leadership, or of leadership loyal to the Patriarch, during a time of great upheaval and insecurity brought areas of discontent into greater relief and allowed non-ecclesiastical leadership to take on new authority. For example, following the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres, a man by the name of Agha Petros (Paturus) Elias appeared to be

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64 Anschütz, p. 128.
67 Coakley, Church and Church, p. 345.
69 Though many authors describe Surma as capable and, therefore, a fitting choice as representative of the Assyrians to the peace conference, Atiya concludes that she had “no means of effective communication with the tribal traditions” of the people, due to her schooling at a missionary facility (p. 285). This is possible, as it would also have been her Europeanized education that would have equipped her to act as spokesperson at a European-dominated international deliberation. On the other hand, if Atiya’s conclusions are correct, Surma’s western orientation may have marred relations with the traditional tribal leaders.
70 Coakley, “Church of the East”. p. 181.
72 For example, Coakley, Church and Church, p. 357.
73 ibid, p. 343.
ready to take the reins of the community. Agha Petros had distinguished himself as a military leader during the war, thus his title of “General”, though he was not of the traditional Assyrian elite, but a former merchant; he had also already established a reputation as an opponent to the Patriarchal family.

In 1920, Agha Petros proposed that, rather than be settled far from their homes in the new British mandate of Iraq, the Assyrians should return en masse to the Urmiya region and form a concentrated and homogenous settlement. The general’s plan was accepted by the majority of the Assyrians (including all of the Urmiyans and roughly two-thirds of the mountaineers), though it was opposed by members of the community’s leadership, predominantly the clergy, who felt that they should wait for approval from the Patriarchal household (i.e. from Surma, who was in Europe). Despite these concerns, the plan went ahead, and a force of several thousand Assyrian fighters left a few months later. Their endeavours failed, however, apparently due to mountaineer-plainsmen divisions and procured little, save to increase hostility towards the Assyrians on the part of the Kurds and Turks and to lead to the subsequent banishment of Agha Petros by the British authorities.

Another example of ambitious non-ecclesiastical leadership is provided by the short-lived “free Assyrian protectorate”, established in the Jazira district of

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74Stafford notes that Agha Petros appeared to be the only individual capable of leading the community at the time and that he termed himself “Commander-in-Chief” of the Assyrians (pp. 40, 100); also Coakley, Church and Church, p. 343.

75De Kelaita, pp. 16-17. Stafford refers to him as “purely an adventurer” and a man of “doubtful antecedents” (pp. 100, 40-41). De Kelaita and Dadesho, on the other hand, reflect the current Assyrian perspective on Agha Petros as an Assyrian national hero and make no mention of possible “closet skeletons”.

76Stafford, p. 41. Dadesho, however, disputes the supposed friction between Agha Petros and the Patriarchal household, claiming that this was fabricated by the British in order to discredit the general, due to their opposition to his proposed plan for Assyrian re-settlement (p. 79). Contradictory to this theory, though, De Kelaita and Stafford note that Petros’ plan was accepted by the British authorities in Iraq, thereby casting doubt on the need of the British to oppose him (De Kelaita, p. 17; Stafford, p. 42).

77According to De Kelaita, the original plan also included the intention to continue west from Urmiya and regain the Hakkari region traditionally occupied by the Assyrians (p. 17). Stafford, however, describes the incursions west as a spontaneous move on the part of the mountaineers during the implementation of the plan, after the Assyrians had had a taste of success (p. 43), which is also the impression given by Gabriele Yonan (Assyrer Heute, Hamburg and Vienna: Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, 1978, p. 55). Dadesho, for his part, records that the intended territory in the Petros plan was northern Iraq, in the vicinity of Mosul (pp. 83-84).

78Stafford, p. 41; De Kelaita, p. 17.

79Stafford records the number at six thousand (p. 42), and De Kelaita at eight thousand (p. 17).

80It appears that the Assyrians originally of the Hakkaris were overly impatient to return to their homes and embarked upon a re-entry into the Turkish mountains without the support of the remainder of the company, whereupon they were repulsed by Turkish-Kurdish forces, who succeeded in driving the Assyrians out of Urmiya as well (Stafford, p. 43).

81Stafford, p. 43: De Kelaita, p. 17.
Syria, between 1919 and 1922. Though apparently initiated by the French authorities, the protectorate was ruled by Malik Kambar D'Malik Benyamin D'Bet-Malik Warda of the tribe of Jelu and possessed its own flag and military. Despite its promising beginnings, the project was abandoned in 1922, and Malik Kambar left for Lebanon (possibly to serve in the French military). Nevertheless, the protectorate remains the only Assyrian geo-political entity to have been established in the modern era. Despite their conception among lay leaders and their independence from ecclesiastical control, these attempts to establish Assyrian autonomy should not be viewed as moves to raise a secular state along nationalistic lines, for there is little to indicate they proposed a different form of government and organization from that which had gone before, which was church-centred. In other words, the efforts of Agha Petros and Malik Kambar demonstrate more of a shift from the established norm than a radical departure, albeit a significant shift, with potential for greater change.

Nevertheless, while these attempts on the part of Assyrian leaders to exercise authority over the whole community did not eradicate the spiritual and religious prestige or position of the Patriarchal family or the Patriarchate, they certainly would have posed challenges to the traditional Patriarchal claims to temporal leadership. As noted above, weak Patriarchs of the past enjoyed less political authority and influence than strong ones and were subject to subtle acts of rebellion (usually the withholding of the Patriarchal tithe collected from the tribes); but these would have entailed a loss of control over only certain tribes or areas, as there were no attempts to assert an alternative authority over the entire Assyrian population, due to its dispersion and tribal structure. Now, however, due to the effects of the war and situation of the Assyrian community (the geographic concentration of the majority of its members and the very real need of a single representative to speak for the entire group), a contender for leadership was apt to gain the following of a much larger portion of the community and possibly the community in its

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82 It is unclear from the sources if the protectorate included only members of the Jelu (Jelu) tribe or others as well, though Dadesho reports that it was intended to gather in all Assyrians (p. 79).
83 ibid.
84 ibid., p. 80.
85 Agha Petros' plan, for example, called for the continued use of the Sunhadus as the basis of the judicial code in the envisioned state, though there was to be no state church (ibid, p. 85); this second point was probably a bid to avoid conflict with the Kurds, Yazidis, and other Christians, notably Armenians, who would also inhabit the region.
86 Prior to the upheaval, the independent Assyrian tribes of the Hakkars operated more or less autonomously and did not depend on mutual interaction in the political realm (Ishaya, Role of Minorities, p. 38).
entirety. Moreover, these new “pretenders to the throne” were not aiming to resist the central-type 
authority of the Patriarch from the base of their own realm of jurisdiction, but rather to create a new 
Assyrian entity, whether state, protectorate, or another politically-bounded territory, where one had not 
existed for centuries. The challenge, therefore, to the temporal headship of the Patriarch was not the tribal 
malik seeking to assert his independence, but a new type of leader seeking to establish a new existence for 
the Assyrian community as a whole. In addition, men such as Agha Petros had the potential to garner the 
support of those segments of Assyrian society imbued with a new sense of being a “nation”, a people 
distinct from others, and who looked for a “national” leader to provide them with security and a future.97

The events spanning early decades of the twentieth century provided stimuli for many of the 
peoples of the Middle East to reconsider their history, identity, and roles in their societies. Already begun 
in the nineteenth century among a small number of elites, the twentieth century saw the spread of new 
terminologies, ways of thinking, and expectations among a much larger number, though certainly not all, 
of the population. Entire populations did not, of course, become intellectual nationalists as a result of 
such movements as the Young Turk Revolution or the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, most 
significantly because the vast majority of Middle Easterners remained illiterate at this time and old 
identities and loyalties remained strong. Nevertheless, the early twentieth century saw the transfer of 
nationalistic-type ideas and expressions from small exclusive circles to country-wide principles of 
government operation. In a similar way, this period brought the dissemination of the potential of 
nationalistic consciousness to a greater number of Assyrians. Though tribal, regional, and other divisions 
endured in the Assyrian community—as demonstrated by the variety of petitions submitted to the Paris 
peace conference and their content—, the recent introduction to revolutionary constitutional regimes, the 
efforts of the few Assyrian intellectual nationalists, and the availability of Western discourse on national / 
racial theories and self-determination (particularly US President Woodrow Wilson’s famous Fourteen 
Points) combined with the memory-/myth-making experience of the war, the confrontation of the reality 
of the extent of the Assyrian community at Baquba, and the fear of the future all worked to impart to the 
Assyrian community a sense of self that was different from its previous millet identity. In addition, this 
period of intense insecurity and development was concomitant with the devastation of the cornerstone of

97See for example, De Kelaita, p. 17.
traditional leadership of the community, the Church of the East. As a result, non-church leaders, some of whom were in conflict with the Patriarchal family, rose to the forefront and sought solutions for the dilemma of the Assyrian community as a whole. Though ultimately none of them succeeded, these lay "heroes" set the tone for any leader to follow, namely the focus on the political (which consequently entailed the social, religious, economic, etc.) security and well-being of the Assyrians; the concern with the population as a people group, rather than as a collection of tribes; and the international character of the struggle, thereby grounding it in the discourse of nation-states.
Chapter Four: Between the Wars: The Mandate Period in Iraq and the Rise of “Nation-States”

The Treaty of Sèvres, finalizing the end of the First World War, re-drew the political map of the Middle East, largely in accordance with European interests. The empire of the Ottomans was dismantled, under pretext of punishment for their participation in the war on the part of the Central Powers, and in its stead several new states were created, including that of Turkey and the kingdom of Iraq. The humiliating conditions of the 1920 treaty, combined with continued encroachments on Turkish sovereignty after the war, led to the end of the Ottoman sultanate and the rise of the Turkish Republic, along with a strong Turkish nationalism. Iraq, the location of the majority of the Assyrians after the war, was a British mandate, and the new country struggled with foreign control, the lack of any cohesive national identity, and a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional population. Iran, for its part, was also undergoing “re-invention” under the newly-inaugurated Pahlavi regime, which augmented the ethnic Iranian focus of the country’s identity. As such, the inter-war period was a time of “nation building” in all three countries, as they sought to instill unifying and cohesive identities. For the Assyrians, divided across several political boundaries, the advent of strong state-sponsored nationalisms often excluded them from participation in the national identities of their home states, particularly in Turkey and Iraq, a process intensified by other mitigating factors, such as their recruitment into the British-organized militia that became known as the Assyrian levies. In addition, the years after World War I saw the return of the Patriarch to an active role in the political representation of his people and the consolidation of the Patriarchal household as the head of the community. As this period was also the time of widespread discussions regarding the situation and the future of the Assyrian community, as well as a time of several formative experiences that aided in the sowing of a wider sense of communal identity, this re-assertion of the dual authorities of the Patriarch (temporal and spiritual) meant that the new emerging Assyrian “nation” came to be identified wholly with the Church of the East. Therefore, as the concepts of “nation” and “national identity” came to be common parlance among a larger segment of the societies in which they lived, the Assyrians were moving from a self-conception as a millet to that of a “nation” (though not in accordance with the definition of this paper), but with their identity still more or less entirely contained within the boundaries of the Church of the East and with the Church continuing to determine the course of the “nation”.

67
Turkey

The close of World War I in Ottoman Anatolia saw the occupation of various part of Istanbul by Allied troops and their subsequent control over significant means of transportation, defense, and civil protection. In addition, the Ottoman system was weak and drained from eight years of war. The demoralization of the Turks was made acute, however, by the European intentions to parcel out Ottoman possessions to each other and to certain indigenous groups (Arabs, Kurds, Armenians), which were, by this time, well known. Therefore, the Greek landing at Izmir, in May 1919, meant to claim certain Ottoman territories and protected by British, French, and US warships, in addition to the implementation of the plan for an independent Armenian state, ignited vocal resistance among the Turks, as they perceived the threat to their territorial sovereignty to now be very real. An underground resistance movement, headed by the military commander Mustafa Kemal (1874–1938), soon began to prepare for armed defense of the country. The defiance shown by the rebels, and their clearly nationalist orientation, won them increasing popularity, and when Parliamentary elections were held in December 1919, the Kemalists and their supporters won the majority of seats. In April 1920, Sultan Mehmet Vahiddin dissolved the Parliament, and in August he accepted the harsh terms of the peace conference and signed the Treaty of Sèvres. Kemal responded by gathering the nationalists at Ankara and, though still proclaiming loyalty to the Sultan, began a full-fledged military resistance against the Allied occupations and the forces of the Porte, who were deemed to have been co-opted by the European powers. The rebels’ eventual victories against the Greeks, driving them from Turkish territory in 1922, and their re-negotiation of favourable treaties with France and Soviet Russia bestowed on the nationalists the image of being the true leaders of Turkish interests and the leaders of the country, both at home and abroad. The perception that the nationalist rebels, and particularly Mustafa Kemal himself (who became known as “Atatürk”), had rescued Turkey from imminent doom and restored Turkish pride was re-inforced by the Treaty of Lausanne, concluded in July 1923 between the nationalists and the European powers, which

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1Lewis, p. 241.
2ibid: Joseph, Muslim-Christian, p. 100.
3Lewis, p. 250.
4ibid, p. 253.
affirmed Turkish sovereignty, abolished the capitulations, and essentially acceded to the nationalist demands as outlined in the famed National Pact.⁵

When the Sultan, with support from the British, dissolved the elected Parliament, the nationalists congregated in Ankara and formed a new parliament, the Grand National Assembly, and soon extended their control to any area not under foreign occupation.⁶ By the time of the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, therefore, the Assembly was the recognized authority of the country, and its first authentic elections were held in August 1923, with Kemal elected as President. The continued leadership of Kemal symbolized the domination of the nationalist vision in the Assembly, and many measures were taken to erect the new Turkish Republic on strong nationalist footings. The early aims of the Assembly were outlined in a speech given by Kemal at the opening of a new session in 1924: the safeguarding and stabilizing of the Republic; the creation of a unified national education system; and the rescue of Islam from its traditional role as “a political instrument”.⁷ In the realization of these goals, the Assembly embarked upon a process of Westernization and secularization of public life: the Turkish language was simplified and standardized, and a Roman, versus Arabic, script adopted; the wearing of traditional Eastern or religious garb, including religious insignias, was prohibited in public (except for actual clerics); the Swiss civil code was adapted to form the new basis of personal and family law, and education was also removed from the jurisdiction of the ‘ulama;⁸ and the Caliph Abdülmecid was deposed and exiled along with all members of his household and the caliphate abolished.⁹

Concomitant with these measures, however, were the steps taken to instill and consolidate the Turkish identity of the state, which, in the light of the area’s recent past, was perceived as a means of self-preservation. Since the Young Turk Revolution, the notion of a unique Turkish identity had developed and become more widespread; but it was still not yet the prime identity at the popular level.

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⁵The National Pact, first drafted in 1919 by a rebel congress held in Erzurum and accepted by the Parliament in 1920, demanded territorial integrity and national independence (that is, for the Turkish nation), and guaranteed minority rights (ibid, p. 248; McCarthy, p. 378).
⁶McCarthy, p. 379.
⁷Lewis, p. 264.
⁸The reforms of the nineteenth century had limited the application of the shari’a to matters of personal status and later Kemal had abolished the traditional religious courts. But the law administered by the new secular judges in family and personal law remained shari’a, and the judges were typically scholars of shari’a (ibid, p. 272); it was this final stronghold of Islamic law that the Assembly moved to eradicate.
⁹Already in 1922 the Assembly had legislated the separation of the sultanate and the caliphate, thereby making the Caliph the head of the religious realm only.
and it was this level of identification that the nationalists sought to cultivate. Education was viewed by the government as the most effective means of inculcating a unifying national identity in the larger population. Despite the weakened condition of the country, the government gave much attention to educational development, and the first official primary school curriculum appeared in 1924. In addition to teaching the common “knowledge for life” subjects of reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography, civics, and nature, which were designed to produce competent republicans, the curriculum also had the aim of “fostering among students as sense of common identity, language, history, ethnic or racial origin, and faith all within the context of a common economic life, geographical location, and political base”. The Turkish language, by this time purged of its Arabic and Iranian influences, was a central component of the government-promoted identity and teaching was conducted in Turkish. Moreover, by 1936, history by-passed civics as the favoured subject in the production of good citizens, as it was to instill a sense of pride in the ancient, Islamic-period, and modern legacy of the Turkish people (while underlining, of course, the evils of the Ottoman past). In fact, the entire educational system was developed to promote the interests of the state and the vision of its leaders. The implementation of the government’s grand design was not without difficulties, however, primarily due lack of resources, and student attendance varied widely throughout the country. The western part of Turkey tended to fare reasonably well, but in 1940, reports indicate that, in the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey, extremely high numbers of children had never been to school: for example, 99 per cent in Hakkari; 96 per cent in Van; and 91 per cent in Mardin and Diyarbakir. It must be remembered that these regions continued to be the centre for

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10For example, the name “Turkey”, meaning “of the Turks”, was not used to designate the Anatolian country until the arrival of the Kemalists (ibid, p. 353).


12Ibid, p. 82. The Ottomans, too, had recognized the importance of education, but had concentrated resources on secondary or higher education; the new focus on primary education in the Republic was a move to include the masses in the socialization process (ibid, p. 124).

13As reflected in the details of the state curriculum of 1936, which build upon the 1924 and 1926 models (ibid, pp. 84, 86).

14Ibid, p. 90.

15Ibid, p. 95, 96-97.

16Epitomized by the inclusion and explanation of various symbolic elements in a student’s education, such as the flag, anthems, pledges, poems, ceremonies, and holidays commemorating a historic event or figure and the glorification of love for the homeland before all else (ibid, p. 102-103, 107).

17Western urban centres such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, and Bursa averaged 79 per cent attendance (ibid, p. 150).

18Ibid.
the Kurds and those Syrian Christians, both East and West, that remained in Turkey. Therefore, it might be speculated that, even if funds had not impeded the establishment of state schools in the region, resistance to the secular and Turko-centric curriculum may still have undermined the government's educational aims.  

Moreover, although the emphasis on the Turkish character of the nation was carried out as part of attempts to reduce the authority of the religious sphere and promote secularism, many of the dividing lines between Muslim and non-Muslim were re-inforced under the new regime. Although the constitution and the law of the Republic granted equality to all citizens, equal treatment of all was undermined by the policies and structures of the state. For example, during World War II, Turkey found itself in economic straits, and in 1942 the government opted to impose a capital levy to shore up the economy. Muslims and non-Muslims were assessed differently for the tax, with non-Muslims paying up to ten times more than their Muslim counterparts. This served to inflame sectarian tensions when it became apparent that many non-Muslims, who continued to dominate in the area of trade and finance, were evading payment, as it would have entailed financial ruin for them. The names of the defaulters, almost entirely Jews, Greeks, and Armenians, were published in newspapers, many were arrested and their property confiscated, and some were deported; moreover, the press referred to them as people of “alien blood” and “Turks only in name”. In addition, in some areas of public life, non-Muslim participation decreased after the creation of the Republic as compared with the Ottoman era, such as representation in the civil service; in other areas, old discriminations continued, as in the military, where non-Muslims were called up to serve but were not given arms. Furthermore, much of the terminology used by the old Ottoman administration, which had religious underpinnings, was adopted by the republican regime, though infused with nationalistic meanings: millet, for example, became the term for “nation”, and şehid, “martyr”, became the term for

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19 This may have been the case, despite the generally high attendance levels in the west even in majority-concentrated areas, due to the historic resistance of the eastern inhabitants to encroachments on their prerogatives by the central government. Resistance would not have resided solely on “ethnic” grounds, but also religious, for the widespread Kurdish nationalism of the early twentieth century was intimately bound to Islam (Olson, p. 1), and many rural parents preferred to keep their children from the state schools in order to work the fields, but also to receive a traditional religious education (Tiregol, p. 160).

20 Lewis, p. 298. There existed two additional categories, one for Sabatean converts to Islam, who paid twice the tax of “born” Muslims, and one for foreigners, who were to be assessed at the Muslim level.

21 ibid.

22 ibid, p. 299.

23 ibid, p. 357.
anyone who sacrificed him or herself for the nation. The educational curriculum also served to maintain the Islamic character of the dominant sector, as it emphasized that Turks and the Turkish nation were Muslim, a sentiment re-inforced by the identity cards assigned to every individual, where only Muslims were designated "Turk" and non-Muslims as "Turkish citizen". As such, regardless of the Assembly's commitment to the separation of mosque and state, the role of Islam in Turkish society was more reinvented than eclipsed.

Iraq

At the end of World War I, the kingdom of Iraq was created from the three Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul -- incorporating historic Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers-- and was appointed as a mandate to Britain. Faysal, a son of the Sharif of Mecca, was crowned king in August 1921. Faysal brought with him former Ottoman army officers, mostly natives of the area, who had fought with him during the Arab revolt of World War I; these became the officers and administrators of Iraq until the end of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958. The army officers were predominantly young, Sunni Arab, while the majority of Iraq's population was Shi'i Arab and were concentrated in the south and had close ties with their co-religionists in Iran. The next largest population in Iraq was the Kurds (Sunni Muslims), who inhabited the northeastern mountain areas and who sought independence. There existed significant Christian and Jewish populations in most of the urban centres, including the Assyrians, who were largely in the vicinity of Baghdad and were strongly oriented on the British.

Therefore, as one author notes, "Iraq was a new state, without common myths of ancestral territory to rely on or common historical memories to appeal to. There was no single past to be re-appropriated by the different groups forming Iraq's population, nor a widespread yearning for collective political

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24Tiregol, p. 6. Even the five pillars of Islam were "republicanized", suggesting, for example that zakat (charitable tithe) could be interpreted as the payment of one's taxes or a donation to a state-approved charity (ibid, p. 110).
25ibid. Despite the fact that the clause in the constitution declaring Islam to be the state religion had been removed (Lewis, p. 276).
26Lewis, p. 357.
28ibid, pp. 2, 3.
There was, therefore, no unifying identity in existence to bind the inhabitants of the nascent state, and the British, in whose hands real power was held, had little interest in providing the fledgling state with a cohesive ideology or identity to replace the traditional loyalties. In fact, British authorities used the divisions between segments of the Iraqi population to aid in maintaining order and acquiescence to the mandate power, including the use of the Kurds and the Assyrians as para-military troops. Moreover, although the British established all the trappings of a constitutional monarchy in Iraq, though without the "political freedoms, individual rights and other forms of 'mass representation' associated with Western liberalism", the rulers were closely allied with imperial interests and served British purposes. Thus, in the decades immediately following the war, the members of the Arab Iraqi government primarily concentrated on consolidating their individual positions in the state apparatus, negotiating the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi treaty, and participating in the state structures established by the British.

Significant opposition to British rule in Iraq did exist, however, emanating from many segments of the native society, both because it represented foreign domination and because it hurt particular group interests. In the early decades of the monarchy, opposition was headed mainly by tribal Shaykhs, merchants, landlords, and (Shi'i) religious leaders, as in the revolt of 1920, as well as in the protests surrounding the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1922 and the first Iraqi elections. In 1929, Iraq agreed to renegotiate its treaty with Britain in return for British sponsorship of Iraq's bid to gain early independence and entrance to the League of Nations. Strikes and demonstrations by the opposition were organized, which were put down by the government by order of Faysal; the harsh suppression succeeded in heightening the anti-British and anti-foreign sentiments, especially when the terms of the new Anglo-Iraqi

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29 Lukitz, p. 79.
30 Simon, pp. 3, 4. A cohesive identity was deemed necessary in order for the government to combat the traditional authority of the tribal shaykhs, village headmen, and religious leaders, who would normally be the ones to exercise many prerogatives of the state, including collection of taxes and exactions of loyalty.
31 ibid, pp. 4, 5.
34 Simon, p. 5; Lapidus, p. 644.
treaty were made public, which virtually gave Britain control of the country. The men who made up the bulk of the new administrators and officers of Iraq, the ex-Ottoman officers, also chafed under British rule, both because they saw it as foreign rule and because of the Arab nationalist ideas that the officers had been imbued with while receiving their Ottoman training and for which they had fought during the war. Nevertheless, this group remained loyal to Faysal and constituted the backbone of his support in the early years after the war. Iraq became independent in 1932, but its government remained racked by internal disputes. The first Iraqi coup in 1936 marked the entry of the military, and, therefore, the Ottoman-trained officers, into Iraqi politics, a feature that was to continue into the present day. Pan-Arabism, Iraqi nationalism, and Islamic sensibilities were all prominent among the Iraqi officers, and after 1936 these orientations dominated the political scene.

Despite the personal, versus policy-oriented, character of Iraqi politics during this early period in its history, Iraq did make substantial progress in two important areas, namely the educational system and the army. Both Britain and the Iraqi leaders wished to secure a modern, stable nation-state in Iraq (though for different purposes), which for Iraqi nationalists entailed the unification of its diverse population by means of a common identity. The school curriculum was perceived early on as a tool that might foster a sense of Iraqi identity among its citizens. Due to the heavy predominance of nationalist Sunni Arab members among those wielding authority in the regime, the proposed Iraqi identity was bound to embody a strong Pan-Arab ideology, with Sunni elements, though without abandoning a commitment to the independence and distinctiveness of Iraq as a sovereign body. Not only would the curriculum work to inculcate a common identity among Iraq’s inhabitants, but also to increase and solidify the legitimacy of

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36 ibid, p. 57.
37 Simon attributes this to the influence of German officers in the organization and teaching of the Ottoman military schools, who themselves had been steeped in the theories of cultural nationalism and its potential to unite disparate groups (pp. 7-9, 20-21). Their training also instilled in them a preference for centralized government and the view that the army was the unifying factor of a country (ibid, pp. 9, 16-17). Although most of the officers began World War I fighting on the side of the Ottomans, by the end, most of those supporting the Sharif of Mecca’s bid for Arab independence were from the three provinces that would become Iraq (ibid, p. 45, 47).
38 Arabism itself was closely tied to Islamism, particularly as articulated by Michel ‘Aflaq, a prominent pan-Arab ideologue and a Christian, who suggested that Islam “expressed best [Arabism’s] genius”, although the Islam advocated by the Arabists was Arabized and, to a certain extent, secularized by its politicization (as quoted in Haj, p. 90).
39 Simon, p. 75.
40 Lukitz, p. 80.
the Iraqi leadership, as its values became internalized by the populace. Already in 1921, Abu Khaldun Sati' al-Husri (1882-1968), a vocal and active Pan-Arab nationalist, was appointed Director General of Education by the king; al-Husri has been called the Father of Iraqi public education, and was responsible for the creation and implementation of its curriculum, teaching methods, texts, and training programs. His vision was that the school, versus the home and family, would be the source of socialization and cultural education, and that compulsory education combined with universal conscription would secure national cohesion. The first Iraqi curriculum, published in 1923, therefore, stressed Arab unity and nationalist (i.e., Iraqi) identity, by means of an emphasis on language and Arab national history, even to the exclusion of other subjects. By 1930, primary school attendance had doubled and that of secondary schools had quadrupled, though the numbers still represented a minority of the Iraqi population. The nationalist push of the curriculum was extended in 1932, as the Ministry of Education decided that all Iraqis needed a common nationalist education, including all minorities, and actively worked to avoid any promotion of segmented communal solidarity or identity. As such, the Ministry opposed subsidies for minority schools and also the opening of teacher-training colleges in areas where the majority of those attending would be from any particular community. Al-Husri’s curriculum was modified and from 1936-1940 the pan-Arab dimension therein was greatly augmented; moreover, over the course of the 1930s, private and denominational schools were required to teach from the Ministry-prescribed texts. All these measures culminated in the Education Law of 1940, which stipulated that only teachers approved by the Ministry were permitted to teach “national” subjects (language, history, 

41 ibid.
42 Al-Husri is often seen as the Arab counterpart to Ziya Gokalp, the pre-eminent theorist of Turkish nationalism and influential contributor to the early Turkish educational system; but it also must be recognized that al-Husri rejected German racial theories, though he did embrace their Romantic notions of nationalism, and that al-Husri promoted a pan-Arab ideal, versus the territorially limited Turkish nationalism of the Turkish Republic.
43 Simon, pp. 75-76. Al-Husri remained active in the promotion of an pan-Arab Iraqi identity through to 1941.
44 ibid, p. 77.
45 Iraqi nationalism at this point consisted predominantly of anti-British sentiments, while the pan-Arab elements emphasized the contribution of the Arab peoples to world civilization, Islam, etc. and thereby downplayed other peoples, including the Ottoman and Iranian regimes.
46 ibid. Arabic language and Arab history accounted for approximately fifty per cent of the teaching hours in primary school (ibid, p. 81).
47 ibid, p. 83.
48 See also Yapp, p. 76.
49 Simon, p. 92.
50 ibid, p. 97.
51 ibid, p. 107.
geography, civics) and teachers were required to file reports regarding students' loyalty to the regime with grades adjusted accordingly; anti-British sentiments, moreover, were encouraged.52

Public education and universal conscription were two halves of one whole: the army, as the schools, was to provide socialization for the citizens; and, therefore, the two worked in conjunction, with the schools being militarized and the army performing as an extension of the educational system.53 The army was viewed as a complementary source of unification for Iraqi society, and the emphasis placed on the development and size of the army reflected the importance of its perceived role.54 At the time of the British takeover in Iraq, there did not exist any official military force in the country; but by 1932, the numbers of the Iraqi army had reached 11,500 and by 1941 they were counted at 44,000.55 Although initially the bulk of officer recruits were drawn from upper class families, gradually members of poorer families and from those resident outside of Baghdad were incorporated.56 Nevertheless, the ex-Ottoman military officers continued to command a considerable portion of officer numbers, dominating until 1941,57 and, presumably, their pan-Arab orientations with them. Following the Assyrian crisis of 1933 (to be detailed below), the popularity of the army, and particularly the officer corps, skyrocketed and it emerged from the event as the new national symbol.58 From 1933 onward, then, the army began to play a significant political role and the officer corps became one of the country's power brokers, along with the ex-Ottoman officers, characterized by their ever-dominant pan-Arab sensibilities, and the younger generation of officers, the recipients of al-Husri's pan-Arabist curriculum.59 The influence of al-Husri's educational vision, therefore, was more than indoctrination, as the emphasis on an individual's "Arabness" discouraged most non-Sunni Arabs and non-Arabs from entering the military colleges due to the scrutiny inflicted by peers and also promoted a resentment of non-Arab advancement in the military.60 As such, the Ministry of Education's programs not only taught students to regard themselves as part of a

52ibid, pp. 107-108.
54Yapp, p. 77; Simon, p. 116.
55Yapp, p. 77.
56ibid.
57ibid.
58Simon, p. 122.
59ibid, pp. 125-126, 131.
60ibid, pp. 133, 134.
unique Arab nation, but also worked to discourage non-Sunni and non-Arab participation in those areas particularly designed to promote a sense of unifying identity.\textsuperscript{61}

Iran

Iran, despite its stance of neutrality during World War I, had inherited as much chaos as its neighbours, due to the occupation of vast swaths of Iranian territory by Britain and Russia, as well as the power vacuum created with the Russian withdrawal in 1917, and the concomitant near-paralysis of Iran's central government.\textsuperscript{62} This disorganization on the part of the government allowed for a coup in 1921, led by Sayyid Zia al-Din Tabatabai and aided by the leader of the Iranian Cossacks, Colonel Reza Khan. Sayyid Zia was a reformer, but his methods alienated the landowners and the court, and he was viewed as a British pawn by Iranian nationalists.\textsuperscript{63} In order to maintain power, therefore, Sayyid Zia came to depend on Reza Kahn, who eventually overshadowed him and took power himself. In 1923, Reza Kahn was named Prime Minister by the Majlis, whereupon he worked to consolidate his position, and, in 1925, he ousted the vestiges of the Qajar dynasty and enthroned himself as Reza Shah Pahlavi, thereby establishing the Pahlavi dynasty that would rule Iran until the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979. Reza Shah (r. 1925-1941) was a nationalist, though not a liberal, and an admirer of Turkey's Mustafa Kemal.\textsuperscript{64} As such, he embarked upon the Westernization and modernization of the country through the reform of education, industry, transportation, communications, the military, and dress.\textsuperscript{65} The period surrounding World War I was additionally a time of growing nationalist sentiments among the Iranian intelligentsia. The war years and the final break-up of the Ottoman Empire prompted discussions among many regarding effective means of dealing with imperialism and Iran's own regional and socio-religious factionalism, with the goal that Iran's unity might be preserved.\textsuperscript{66} Despite the many country-wide changes that had occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the dominant loyalties of the various groups inhabiting

\textsuperscript{61}ibid, pp. 133-134.
\textsuperscript{62}Cottam, p. 18; Abrahamian, pp. 116-117.
\textsuperscript{63}Cottam, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{64}ibid, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{65}ibid, pp. 20-21.
\textsuperscript{66}Vaziri, p. 188.
Iran remained divided by geography, tribal affiliations, or linguistic-socio-religious differences. The intensification of concerns regarding Iran's future coincided, however, with the rise of the Pahlavi regime and permitted the implementation of strongly nationalist policies that aimed to unify and empower the country.

Along with its work to improve transportation and communications across Iran, which themselves greatly contributed to the dismantling of traditional barriers (geographic and otherwise) among peoples, and its suppression of tribal revolts, the Pahlavi regime implemented a very secular educational program, imposed Farsi as the language of Iran, and used government structures to propagate a unique Iranian identity, in hopes of appealing to many of Iran's diverse inhabitants. Although a Department of Elementary Education had been founded as early as 1910 under the Qajars, Reza Shah positioned the state at the centre of the educational system, both in terms of supervision and in terms of its focus and content. As did Atatürk, Reza Shah greatly limited the participation of the clerical class in public life, not only legislating new law codes in 1928, replacing the shari'a, but also establishing a secular education system and imposing government control over education. In 1935, primary education was legally made universal, free, and compulsory (though enforcement of this law was delayed), and in 1941 all private schools were brought under government supervision. Moreover, the European racial theories and Orientalist histories of Iran had been part of the Western education undergone by the court advisors and ideological supporters of Reza Shah, and, consequently, racial theories and Aryan- or "nationally"-oriented histories became prominent elements in Iran's revised public education. In addition, the Pahlavi era witnessed a shift in the intended goals of education: whereas previously education, which was centred around religious instruction, was viewed as a means to impart certain "fundamental subjects" (content-oriented), after the rise of Reza Shah, education became a means by which to form members of Iranian

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68 Vaziri, p. 192.
69 ibid, pp. 194-195.
70 Lapidus, p. 581.
72 Vaziri, p. 194. The court also had many German advisors.
73 ibid, p. 195.
society (socialization-oriented). Specifically, Reza Shah viewed education as a medium through which government policies might be advanced. As such, state-focused activities or "rituals" became elements of the education experience. Part of the Iranian school curriculum of the 1930s was the recitation of nationalistic verses, singing of patriotic songs, and the pledging of allegiance to the flag. Beyond inculcating patriotism, however, education under Reza Shah was also used to foster a form of Iranian nationalism. The Farsi language was of particular importance towards this end: all teaching and school texts were to be in Farsi, and teachers were accordingly instructed to teach in a standardized pronunciation, avoiding all regional dialectical variances. As well as promoting internal unity, the language became a boundary marker between the Iranian community and the "other", as it was promoted as a medium of resisting the Arab culture.

The emphasis on the "Iranian" in the educational system was indicative of the general tenor of the government's policies during this age. For example, outside of the schools, the state worked to instill a sense of being uniquely Iranian, often with a not too subtle anti-Arab shading. An academy was established to purge the Farsi language of its borrowed elements and replace them with pure Farsi words. Moreover, in addition to their exclusion from the classroom, the use of or publishing in regional or ethnic languages was prohibited in a general sense. Furthermore, the names of several provinces (e.g. Lurestan and Arabestan) were changed from their traditional ethnically-identifying names to ones that reflected their ties to the "Persianized monarchical center" (Kermanshah and Khuzestan, respectively). Pre-Islamic Zoroastrian emblems and symbols appeared on government agencies and buildings to heighten the link of contemporary Iran with its ancestral past (the era undiluted by Arab influence) and Zoroastrian festivals were given special attentions; even the monarchy was touted as a specifically Iranian

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76Vaziri, p. 195.
77Menashri, pp. 95, 96.
78Vaziri, p. 195. Arab culture was often made synonymous with Islamic civilization and religion, thereby making it a threat to the establishment of a sense of unique Iranian identity. Additionally, the promotion of "Arabness" in neighbouring Iraq, particularly after the 1958 revolution in that country, heightened the perceived need for a strong Iranian identity to counter Arab nationalism. (See also Yapp, p. 427.)
79ibid., p. 197.
81Sanasarian, p. 15.
institutions. However, despite the regime’s embracing of pre-Islamic Iranian heritage and its enforcement of outward secularization—for instance, a movement to ban the wearing of the veil in schools and government offices began in 1936—Islam continued to play an important role in Iranian society, including at the official level. One example of this is found in state education, where, even after World War II, “religious instruction” still occupied six hours per week in the primary school curriculum for grades one to four and continued with three hours per week in grades five and six. As such, the Pahlavi reforms worked more to limit the participation of the religious stratum in the public sphere than to reduce the link between the general Iranian identity and Islam. Although the impact of Reza Shah’s initiatives on the masses of Iran’s inhabitants is uncertain, and was most likely limited, they were, nevertheless, generally well received by the growing numbers of the new urbanized middle class created by the modernization of the country. But even among those living in the outlying areas of Iran, it is probable that the base for Iranian solidarity was expanded due to the combined effects of modernization.

The period between the two World Wars, therefore, was a time of nation-state building for many countries in the Middle East, including Iran and the new states of Turkey and Iraq. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, particularly under the pressure of rising nationalisms among many of its communities, served to demonstrate in a very real way the power of group loyalties, as well as the danger that politicized communal identities could pose to a regime. It was in regard to these issues that the intelligentsias and native governing authorities of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran aimed to promote strong identities for their citizens. Often, these identities had “pan” elements—such as the early pan-Turkism instilled by the Young Turks, the pan-Arabism of the Iraqi elite, and the Aryanism of early Iranian national identity—but were, nevertheless, concentrated on fostering identities centred on the respective state and territorially-based loyalties. In essence, the task of the governments was to define a new type of

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82 Vaziri, pp. 197-198.
83 Woolman, p. 18.
84 Sassani, p. 10.
85 Ramezanzadeh, p. 81.
86 ibid, p. 196.
87 ibid, p. 198.
relationship among geography, political entity, and community. The configuration of the identity adopted as "national" reflected the composition of the governing strata: in Turkey and Iran this coincided with the majority ethnic and religious populations, though in Iraq it did not to the same extent. Various means were employed in the dissemination of the state-sponsored loyalties, the most significant being, despite its early limited effectiveness, the common attempt at founding a widespread public educational system. The impact of the new state education systems would demonstrate itself over time, as those educated in the new government system were often the ones to become the next generation of leaders in their countries.

Assyrians

The Assyrians were one of the number of communities in the Middle East confronted by rising state-sponsored national identities. Many Assyrians had found their way back to their former homes: by 1922, most of the Iranian Assyrians had returned to Urmiya, by agreement with the Iranian government, and, although Turkey had specified its refusal to allow the Assyrians to return, a certain number did, nevertheless, infiltrate the border and re-occupy their villages. Information regarding the situation of the Iranian Assyrians during the period between the two World Wars is sparse, and little detail is known of their encounters with the Pahlavi initiatives. It is certain, however, that tensions between the Urmian Assyrians and their neighbours remained, due to the events during the war, particularly the hardships caused in the area as a result of the mass emigration of the Hakkari Assyrians onto the plains. Nevertheless, it appears that the Assyrians maintained cordial relations with the central government (perhaps due to their continued geographical distance from the centre of power), though they maintained their own sense of identity. As for Turkey, those Assyrians that returned to their homes by agreements reached with the local Kurds were driven out in 1924 by Turkish troops, most likely in a bid to strengthen Turkey’s position in the on-going negotiations before the League of Nations regarding the final status of

99 Ibid., p. 7.
90 Although the majority of the population of Iraq was indeed Arab, the Sunni-Shi’i divide remained significant enough at the early phase of Iraqi history to check Shi’i support for a regime and policies viewed by the community as Sunni in origin.
91 Joseph, Nestorians, pp. 163-164.
93 See comments in Sanasarian, p. 107; Ramezanzadeh, p. 119.
the vilayet of Mosul, an area claimed by the British regime in Iraq as well. The majority of the Assyrians, therefore, were found within the borders of Iraq in the years following World War I.

Because of their ties with the British and their aspirations for communal autonomy, the Assyrians largely resisted re-settlement in Iraq and for some time remained concentrated in the refugee camps the British had established for them. The British authority decided in 1921 to employ Assyrians in the paramilitary levy corps of Iraq. Until this time, the Iraqi levies had been drawn primarily from the Arab population; some Kurds were also employed. But with the formation of the Iraqi army, the majority populations were no longer available for levy recruitment, and by 1928 the levies were composed entirely of Assyrians. The Assyrian levies were to act as local law enforcement for their own community and to guard British interests on the Mosul frontiers. The levies, made up of members of various Assyrian tribes, were housed in buildings supplied for them in Habaniyya, a British air base, along with their families. All in all, by the time of Iraq’s independence approximately 4,000 Assyrians had served in the levies, with the maximum number serving at any one time being around 2,500. The success of the Assyrians in the levy corps earned them the respect of the British officers in Iraq, which elicited the reputation of the Assyrians as a “martial race”, along with imagery depicting them as “independent mountain people”, “traditional fighters”, and “hard and bold soldiers”. characteristics associated with the ancient Assyrians. These images, and notions of their parallelism to the ancient community, were instilled in the Assyrians by the British officers with whom they served, with the result that the independence and success of the levies became a matter of upholding communal pride and a means of maintaining a link with their past. At the same time, their close ties to and preferential treatment by the British alienated the Assyrians from the rest of the Iraqi population. The Assyrians internalized the not-

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94 Joseph, Nestorians, p. 176. The expulsion appears to have been incited by an incident wherein the Turkish Vali (governor) was abused by Assyrian residents when he attempted to collect taxes (Stafford, p. 46).
95 Stafford, p. 63.
96 ibid, pp. 63, 65; Al-Rasheed, p. 48.
97 Al-Rasheed, p. 48.
98 ibid, pp. 48, 50.
99 Stafford, p. 72. If it is assumed that each Assyrian levy was part of a family of four persons, then approximately 16,000 Assyrians had participated in the “levy experience” by 1932. Moreover, as the levies were not disbanded until 1955 (Al-Rasheed, p. 49), it is possible that over 30,000 persons passed through the levies’ Habaniyya camp, not an insignificant percentage of the Assyrians’ small population.
100 ibid, pp. 49-50; c.f. Stafford, pp. 65, 66, 71, 72.
101 Al-Rasheed, p. 50.
102 The Assyrian levies were paid more than soldiers in the Iraqi army and received better uniforms.
uncommon disdain held by the British officers for the Arab regime of Iraq (and, therefore, the Iraqi Arab population in general), a sentiment no doubt reinforced by a few small-scale eruptions between the levies and the Arab inhabitants of Mosul in 1923 and 1924. Moreover, the Assyrian levies were used both to defend the border with Turkey and to suppress internal uprisings and revolts in Iraq, which put them in direct conflict with the majority communities of the region. For example, in 1921, the levies, containing many Assyrians, rebuffed combined Turkish and Kurdish forces, as Turkey attempted to gain control over any territory having a majority Turkish or Kurdish population; from 1924 to 1927, the levies were engaged in near-constant operations against Shaykh Mahmud, a Kurd; in 1930, the levies, along with the British Royal Air Force, and the Iraqi army, suppressed the Kurdish uprising protesting the proposed independence of Iraq; and during the Iraqi rebellion against the British in 1941, it was the Assyrian levies that defended the Habaniyya air base from nationalist Arab forces led by pro-Axis Iraqi Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gailani.

Those Assyrians who did not join the levies gradually settled in the British-held province of Mosul: the Assyrians originally from the Mosul region returned to their homes and farms, while the Hakkari Assyrians received new settlements. Nevertheless, the final status of the mountaineers remained undetermined, and many of the Assyrians did not fare well. Of those that did prosper in their new situations, the majority appear to have continued to have regarded themselves as refugees, in a state of transition, and, therefore, to have maintained themselves apart from the rest of the Iraqi population, even as late as the mid-1930s: for example, very few spoke Arabic, and many found employment in the despised British-controlled oil industry. In 1925, the League of Nations awarded the northern Hakkari region of the former Ottoman province of Mosul to Turkey and the southern portion to Iraq; this brought an end to the question of the Assyrians' possible return to their mountain homes, and various scenarios were proposed regarding their permanent home, ranging from settlement in northern Iraq, to elsewhere in

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103 Stafford, pp. 70, 67-68, 112.
105 Stafford, p. 68.
106 Joseph, Nestorians, p. 190.
107 Al-Rasheed, pp. 48-49.
108 Stafford, pp. 44-45, 49.
109 ibid, p. 49.
110 ibid, pp. 60-61.
the Middle East, to overseas (including Canada); but these were all eventually abandoned.\textsuperscript{111} The Iraqi government and the British mandate authority then began work on finding suitable permanent homes for the Assyrians. Their success is a topic of debate as several authors contend that the Assyrians continued to be unhappy in their assigned regions due to various concerns, including health issues and the arability of the soil,\textsuperscript{112} though others point to demonstrations of satisfaction on the part of the bulk of the community.\textsuperscript{113} Regardless of the acceptance or lack thereof in regards to their new living conditions, the Assyrians were generally opposed to the plans for Iraqi independence. Due to their now entrenched ambivalent relations with the Arab Iraqi government, as well as the lack of specific guarantees for their physical and cultural protection,\textsuperscript{114} the leaders of the Assyrian community sent many petitions of protest to the League of Nations prior to Iraq's official independence in 1932. These, along with the services provided by the Assyrian levies to Britain, the continued aspirations for autonomy articulated by some Assyrian leaders, and the history of sour relations between the Assyrians and Iraqis, convinced the Iraqi government that the Assyrians were part of a British plot to undermine their efforts to gain independence and to establish the state on solid footing.\textsuperscript{115}

After Iraq gained independence, the situation of the Assyrians took a dramatic turn for the worse. Tensions between the Assyrians on the one hand and the Iraqi government and the Arab populace on the other were running high, when, in May 1933, while King Faysal was visiting Europe, Patriarch Eshai Shimun was called to Baghdad to meet with governmental representatives. Once there, the Patriarch was asked to renounce his claims to temporal authority, to support the government, and to demonstrate his loyalty to the monarchy through the signing of a document outlining these requests. Mar Shimun, through an interpreter, affirmed his loyalty to Iraq and the King, but refused to relinquish any temporal authority

\textsuperscript{111} The Assyrians themselves were not informed of the League's decision at this time.
\textsuperscript{113}Stafford, pp. 54-55.
\textsuperscript{114}Minorities in Iraq had been granted the rights to freedom of worship (including an end to the ban on Muslim conversion) and equal representation in the electoral system (assigning designated seats to minority representatives) in the 1924 Constitution (Robert Brenton Betts, \textit{Christians in the Arab East: A Political Study}, 1975; rpt. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978, p. 35). Following the 1933 Assyrian incident, Iraq moved to improve its image regarding minority relations and removed communal identity from students' records and forbade "sectarian propaganda" in schools; although in the same period, promotion of the Arabic language increased along with the Arabization of the public sphere (Simon, p. 65).
\textsuperscript{115}Moreover, the Iraqi nationalists saw the Assyrians as refugees, living on Iraqi soil due to the generosity of its people.
or to sign the document placed in front of him. He was subsequently placed under house arrest in Baghdad and then exiled. The Assyrian community became very anxious upon hearing the news of the Patriarch's detention, and fears were aggravated when members of the Iraqi parliament made inflammatory speeches that heightened the animosity of the Iraqi populace. In July, the Assyrian leaders were summoned to a meeting with the acting governor of Mosul and British representatives and informed of the decision by the League of Nations to assign the Hakkari region to Turkey and to reject the Assyrians' appeals for autonomy; the leadership was advised to accept the settlement plan put forward by the Iraqi government and their status as part of Iraqi society. Great disagreements erupted among the Assyrian leaders, some of whom were in favour of developing conciliatory relations with the government, and others who wished to support the Patriarch. In response, a certain faction of the Assyrians, led by Malik Yacoub who was ostensibly acting as representative of Mar Shimun, decided to leave for Syria, where they hoped to live under French protection. Leaving their families in Iraq, they entered into discussions with the French mandate authority; but in crossing back into Iraq, the Assyrians were met by Iraqi troops; shots were fired and in the fighting that followed several members of both parties were killed. The incident set the flame to the tinder-box, as exaggerated accounts of a massive armed Assyrian uprising circulated among the Arab populations of Baghdad and Mosul; upwards of 1000 Assyrians were massacred, even those who had demonstrated loyalty to the regime, and several villages looted in the aftermath. Some Assyrians did settle in Syria, but those remaining in Iraq were told by the League of Nations in 1937 to forego any plans of settlement elsewhere. Tensions with the majority population of Iraq continued, however, and, following the aforementioned incident of 1941, a British intelligence officer described the hatred of the Arabs for the Assyrians as being even greater than that for the British.

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117 The Iraqi plan entailed the settlement of the community in scattered units, rather than as a homogeneous group as proposed by the League of Nations (Nisan, p. 164).
118 Joseph, Nestorians, p. 201.
119 Stafford, pp. 141-144. The record of the League of Nations includes a telegram from the Iraqi government regarding the events of 1933 which makes no mention of the divisions in the Assyrian leadership and, in contrast, notes that the “leaders expressed almost unanimously their satisfaction with the policy” (League of Nations, Official Journal, No. 10, p. 1, 1933, p. 1112).
120 In memo from the French government in League of Nations, p. 1115; Stafford, on the other hand expresses doubt that the Patriarch was aware of Yacoub's plan (pp. 121, 132-140, 144-147).
121 Joseph, Nestorians, p. 203.
123 Al-Rasheed, p. 49.
situation was not ameliorated by the siding of the Assyrians with the Allied powers during World War II, in contradiction to the Iraqi government’s support for the Axis, which lasted until 1941 when the British worked to oust Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani and restore Hashimite rule. In fact, even as late as 1945, Assyrian leaders within Iraq continued to press the international community for outside protection, even should that necessitate the emigration of the community.

It was during this period of expectation in the Assyrian community, as its members waited for questions of settlement and status to be decided, that the Patriarch and the Patriarchal family re-asserted their claim to the leadership of the community. This re-assertion was not necessarily due to any conscious aim on the part of the members of the Shimun family to attain hegemony, but rather to their position as the only representatives with any broad-based legitimacy among the people, with recognition among the foreign powers, and with a historical pedigree. Following the permanent return of Mar Shimun to Iraq in 1927, after the completion of his studies abroad, many factors served to affirm the Patriarch in his traditional role. With the fall of Agha Petros from prominence in the Assyrian leadership, there remained little effective and organized opposition to the Patriarchal family. Again, though some opposition did indeed continue, as amply demonstrated by the divisions created over the question of the Assyrians’ settlement in Iraq, there was no longer one individual who could claim to speak on behalf of this opposition or offer an alternative representative for the community. Moreover, the recent experiences of the community had led many to be suspicious of any schemes, and, in 1921. W.A. Wigram, missionary to the Assyrians, remarked that the Assyrians resisted putting their faith in any leader, apparently including Mar Shimun. The Patriarch himself also faced criticism upon his return for his long absence and due to fears he had become anglicized. The Patriarch was, however, “rescued”, in a sense, from

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125 Ibid., pp. 26-37.
126 Agha Petros did not immediately fade from view. In 1923, he apparently petitioned the League of Nations conference in Lausanne requesting the establishment of an Assyrian territory, including Urmiya and Salmas, and later petitioned the governments of the war-time Allies individually (Dadesho, pp. 92-94, 101-102). Dadesho notes that many other Assyrian leaders were beginning to fear for their positions due to Petros’ activities and that he aroused the ire of the British, who expelled him from Iraq on several occasions; the general died at a railroad station in Paris in 1932, under mysterious circumstances (ibid, p. 102).
127 As noted above; also Stafford, pp. 54, 121-123.
128 Coakley, *Church and Church*, p. 344.
129 Ibid., p. 349.
potential popular disapproval by the continuing esteem in which he was held by the British, as it was to Mar Shimun that the mandate authorities and British representatives turned when in need of Assyrian participation. For example, although it had been due to the efforts of Wigam that some 200 Assyrians had initially joined the levies in 1921, the British prevailed upon the Patriarchal family to assist them in persuading the troops to re-enlist at the end of their contracts. Moreover, Mar Eshai Shimun’s father, David, was appointed as Chief Liaison Officer for the levies, a move which granted the family a great deal of authority over the corps and which, in turn, served to bolster the authority of the Patriarch over the community in general. This symbiotic relationship between the governing authorities and the Patriarchal family appeared to only deepen with time, as the Commission of the League of Nations reported in 1925 that the Shimun family was the only Assyrian authority recognized by both the British and the Iraqi government.

Additionally, the Patriarch dedicated himself to fulfilling the role of primary political representative for the community. Following his return to Iraq, Mar Shimun focused his attention on attempts to secure concentrated settlement and autonomy for the Assyrians, essentially on the basis of the claims made at the various peace conferences at the end of World War I: the insecurity of the Assyrian position among neighbouring peoples (Arabs, Turks, Kurds); the history of the community’s service to the European powers; and the Assyrians’ rights as a nation. The Patriarch’s political activities took many forms and involved the internal Iraqi arena, as well as the international one: for example, in 1928, he sent a petition to the League of Nations protesting the situation of the community in Iraq and the proposed settlement plan; in 1932, the Shimun family was evidently the instigator of “levy mutiny”, whereby the levies en mass gave notice of resignation in protest to plans for Iraqi independence, with the Patriarch acting as the representative for the Assyrians in the subsequent negotiations with the British High Commissioner; later in 1932, the Patriarch travelled to Geneva to present the Assyrian National Pact to the League of Nations, detailing Assyrian demands for recognition as a “millet” -- in the sense of “nation”,

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130 Stafford, p. 66.
131 ibid.
132 ibid, p. 102. Moreover, when the Iraqi government sought to secure the loyalty of the Assyrian community around the time of Iraqi independence, it concentrated the efforts of its agents on discrediting the Patriarch, thereby demonstrating the influence that he was felt to wield (ibid, p. 121).
133 ibid, pp. 103-104. It was also to the Patriarch that the British directed their appeals for the return of the levies, and it was he who sent letters to the various members directing them to return to the force (ibid, pp. 115-116).
not simply as a religious or racial community—\textsuperscript{134} and for a concentrated and internally self-governing settlement, including the official entrenchment of Mar Shimun's position as ecclesiastical and temporal leader;\textsuperscript{135} and he was the author of several petitions to the League of Nations during the events of 1933.\textsuperscript{136}

Even after his exile from Iraq, the Patriarch continued to present requests to the League of Nations and member governments in efforts to alter the situation of the community in Iraq. Moreover, the bulk of the Assyrians themselves appear to have preferred Patriarchal leadership to other possible alternatives, as it was customary from the time of the end of the war for the community to submit grievances to the British High Commissioner via the Patriarch (which were then transferred to the Iraqi government)\textsuperscript{137} and as it was he who was selected by the Assyrian leaders as their "national" representative at a meeting in 1932.\textsuperscript{138} The weight of the influence of Mar Shimun may also be deduced from the significance attached to his apparent opposition to all plans for resettlement of the Assyrians devised by the Iraqi government, as by 1933 the British and Iraqi authorities considered him to be a major obstacle to the final settlement of the community.\textsuperscript{139} In the time of the Assyrians' great political insecurity and social confusion, therefore, it was evidently the Patriarch and the Patriarchal family who were regarded as the ultimate leadership of the community. As such, though it was not uncontested or absolute, the role of the Patriarch and of his household in the leadership of the community was amplified from the time of the end of the war, in the sense that Mar Shimun assumed the role of head of a "nation" versus of a socio-religious group.

In the aftermath of World War I, therefore, the Assyrian community was divided among states that sought to instill in their citizens a new sense of collective territorially-centred identity and pursued

\textsuperscript{134}This is a reflection of the transference of meaning that many traditional words underwent in this period, where the previous, non-politicized sense becomes imbued with new ideas and connotations. As discussed previously, \textit{millet} had no "nationalistic" meaning in Ottoman times (save in the later nineteenth century, and then only limited to a few early nationalists), but it took on nationalistic meaning for many during the twentieth century, particularly in Turkey.

\textsuperscript{135}Details in \textit{ibid}, pp. 117-120, 121. Even after Iraqi independence, Mar Shimun endorsed a petition put forward by Captain A. Hormuzd Rassam (nephew to the late Patriarch Benyamin Shimun and, therefore, a member of the Patriarchal family) to the League of Nations (\textit{Coakley, Church and Church}, pp. 253-254; c.f. Stafford, pp. 92, 95).


\textsuperscript{137}Stafford does note of some instances, however, when petitions were submitted directly to the British representatives by Assyrians, but these additionally contained complaints brought against the Patriarch as well (p. 54).

\textsuperscript{138}\textit{ibid}, pp. 105, 104, 117.

new forms of widespread, state-oriented socialization, primarily in the form of expanding and nationalizing public education. The Assyrians, however, entered the post-war era with their well-entrenched “millet identity” and their common experience of war-time suffering; as such, the Assyrians, as many other groups in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, did not regard themselves as a part of the new proposed “nations”. Particularly in Iraq, their sense of distinctiveness, as well as their unique ties to the British, meant that their separation from mainstream Iraqis continued long after the war, which, naturally prevented any large-scale assimilation into Iraqi society. The creation and long-term maintenance of the Assyrian levies and their service to the British authorities in Iraq epitomized the Assyrians’ situation in Iraq: they lived as a community apart from other Iraqis, in terms of habitation, education, and interaction; not only did this limit contact between the Assyrians and the dominant populations, but also served to foster a distinctive Assyrian experience and, therefore, way of life. The existence of the Assyrian communities as socio-cultural anomalies, combined with their resistance to the internalization of state-sponsored identities, resulted in a general antagonism towards the Assyrians (as it did with other groups presenting the same problem to the achievement of social homogeneity, such as the Kurds, Chaldeans, and Armenians in Turkey, the Arabs, Turkomen, and Kurds in Iran, and the Shi’is and Kurds in Iraq). This served to further entrench the Assyrians’ sense of separation and isolation from the mainstream societies and to heighten their fears concerning their future under the rule of other peoples.

The Assyrians’ maintenance of boundaries around their community did not indicate, however, a prevailing sense of “nationhood”, as the ultimate goal continually demonstrated by the various regional groupings was to return to their lives as they had been before the war. For the Iranian and Mosul-originating Assyrians this was more or less permitted, but for the mountaineers, the majority of the population, this was made impossible by the designation of the northern part of the province to Turkey and Turkey’s refusal to allow Assyrian repatriation. The mountain tribes were, therefore, obliged to remain in Iraq; but even here, division regarding the preference of the community prevailed, as some -- headed by Mar Shimun and the Patriarchal family-- voiced resistance to the settlement plans proposed, while others --headed by several tribal leaders (long-standing opponents to the Patriarch), as well as the intellectuals-- appeared ready to begin anew in Iraq and opposed the Patriarch’s interference.140

140 Stafford, pp. 121-123, 101.
Nevertheless, on both sides, with the exception of a few individuals, the primary concerns of the Assyrian people appear to have been security and livelihood, rather than questions of their own nation-building. The recent history of the Assyrians had provided the possibility for a larger communal identity drawn along non-traditional lines, but this was not realized in the popular realm during the decades following World War I. The inter-war period also marked the Patriarch’s re-appearance on the Assyrian leadership scene and his dedication to political activity on behalf of his people; through this, the Patriarch (re-)established himself as the highest authority over the community, in the eyes of both the international community and of the majority of the Assyrians themselves. Furthermore, the re-emergence of the Patriarch heralded an important change in the presentation of the community, as he was now styled as the head of a “nation” (according to contemporary views, though not according to the definition of nation as outlined in this paper), rather than as the leader of a millet; and it was on behalf of a “nation” that Mar Shimun made his many appeals for autonomy. The preeminence of the Patriarch in the articulation and representation of the Assyrian cause and Assyrian concerns, in addition to the continued socio-political role of the remaining Assyrian clergy,141 and the localized concerns of the community meant that the identity of the Assyrians remained within the configuration of a political religious community, in other words, as being very similar in essence, if not in terminology, to the traditional conception of a millet. Consequently, the conceptual boundaries of the Assyrian millet became virtually synonymous with the nascent conception of the Assyrian “nation” and with the corollary that the Church of the East assumed the role of political representative of the community’s political aspirations.142 These complex ties between “nation” and “Church” endured through subsequent decades, but were also to prove problematic as the Church’s self-perceived role as an Assyrian institution and the nationalistic conceptions of Assyrian identity began to diverge.

141 ibid, p. 66; De Kelaita, p. 18.
142 Obviously this melding of church and nation did not apply to those already convinced of a secular national identity along the lines of that articulated by the Urmiyan intellectuals in the late nineteenth century and the US Assyrians at the Paris Peace Conference.
Chapter Five: Re-settlement, Emigration, Diaspora

The decades after the First World War were a time of intense and rapid change for the Assyrian community, as they were for many Middle Eastern peoples, during which the Assyrians lost their traditional homes and gained new ones, experienced the metamorphosis of their traditional forms of leadership, and felt drawn both to acquiesce to the demands of their new governments and to resist dispersion and assimilation. The period following the Second World War maintained these themes, but expanded and particularized them in several ways. Those Assyrians still living in Iraq and Iran, faced with strong state-sponsored nationalisms, were forced to choose between acceptance of their designated place as part of larger societies and continuance of active and direct confrontation with their governments. Most chose the former, though some accepted the latter, more precarious course. The mid-twentieth century and onwards was also the time of the rise of the diaspora Assyrian community. Although Assyrians had emigrated abroad since the nineteenth century, the period after World War II saw the growth and consolidation of the diaspora as a “rival” centre of Assyrian life, particularly with its organized and active articulations of a non-traditional understanding of Assyrian identity. This new identity did find expression in a nationalistic vision on the part of a small segment of Assyrians, but, more significantly, translated into a widely accepted secular conception of Assyrian identity, as one based on language and heritage rather than religious affiliation. Despite the change in emphasis of the secularized version of Assyrian identity away from its traditional base in the Church of the East, the Church was not banished from a role in Assyrian communal self-conception, but became more of a cultural pillar rather than the primary boundary marker of the community. This movement was concomitant with a general lessening of national representation and agitation at the political level on the part of the Church of the East, which resumed focus on religious and ecclesiastical affairs. Therefore, while the expanding secularized Assyrian identity and its nationalistic counterpart, on the one hand, continued to have a symbiotic relationship with the Church of the East, on the other, their divergence of interests and goals not infrequently also placed them at odds. The later twentieth century, therefore, has witnessed the core of the national identity of the Assyrian community shift from being the near-exclusive possession and responsibility of the Church of the East to its metamorphosis into a “blood-and-language” ethnicity, while never fully abandoning its co-dependent relationship with the Church.
In the years following World War I, the government of Turkey succeeded in blocking the return of the Assyrians to the mountains and also in depleting much of the countryside of its remaining Christian population, mostly through exertion of forces that encouraged emigration; as such, the activities of the Turkish state in relation to the Assyrians will no longer be examined in detail in this paper. Suffice it to note that those Christians who remained in Turkey, as well as other non-Turkish or non-Muslim groups such as the Kurds, Yazidis, and others, experienced a great degree of pressure to assimilate culturally, as the government pursued a strong policy of Turkification. The emphasis on Turkish heritage and language as initiated under Mustafa Kemal continued in the state's educational system, and additionally personal and place names also underwent Turkifying revisions to obliterate distinctively ethnic associations. Churches and monasteries were placed under government supervision, with the result that their activities were sorely impeded; the establishment of specifically Assyrian or Chaldean educational or social institutions was forbidden; and historical sites of Christian heritage remained neglected. Moreover, the threat to physical security remained constant, due to the military clashes between the Kurds and the Turkish military in the eastern part of the country, again impacting other inhabitants regardless of their ideological or political stance. Furthermore, despite the constitutional rights provided for all Turkish citizens, regardless of religion, there were not infrequent nationally- and religiously-inspired attacks perpetrated specifically against Christians. By 1985, it was estimated that no more than 450 Assyro-Chaldean families remained in their traditional lands within the Turkish border.

2Ibid., pp. 329, 325: Martin M. van Bruinessen, “The Christians of Eastern Turkey, the State and the Local Power Structure”, ICMC Migration News, no. 3-4, 1979, pp. 43, 46. These attacks are somewhat attributable to the changing economic situation of Turkey, as it became increasingly industrialized and part of the world system of trade: among other consequences, as Christians were typically better educated and, therefore, more able to capitalize on new technology, etc., they would often fare better than their Muslim counterparts, thereby arousing jealousy (van Bruinessen, p. 45).
In Iraq, the Second World War brought a deterioration in official British-Iraqi relations, and the Iraqi government eventually sided with Germany in the war effort. However, as the kingdom was an integral link in Britain's movement of troops from India to Europe, the European power continued to utilize its air base at Habaniyya. In 1941, the Iraqi government responded by ordering the army to surround the base and threatened to shoot down British planes; eventually fighting broke out between the two sides, and, despite early Iraqi gains, the British forces soon prevailed and occupied Baghdad. During this time, minorities and non-Arabs were made scapegoats by Iraqi elements; popular frustration was vented particularly against Jews, nearly two hundred of whom were killed in riots in Baghdad following the British defeat of the Iraqi army. The British again gained control of Iraq and established a government along similar “liberal” lines as under the mandate. Under this second “occupation” of Iraq, the British authorities undertook a purge of the Arab nationalist elements, in both the government and the army. Among other measures, school textbooks and curricula were re-written to eliminate the pan-Arab and militaristic elements. Instead, the “Iraqi” -- that is, Mesopotamian-based -- content of the school curriculum was augmented, so that, although the Arab element remained, the Iraqi dimension overshadowed it. But the British occupation, along with its facade Arab government, was not to last and, in 1958, a coup, led by a group known as the “Free Officers”, ended the authoritarian rule of the now unpopular Hashimite monarchy, which was viewed by the populace as a pawn of foreign interest.

The newly-formed governing cabinet followed the example of the British and immediately effected a purge of members of the “ancien régime” from the structures of the government, military, civil service, and police. Although Iraqi nationalism and pan-Arab nationalism were often interlinked in the minds of many Iraqis regardless of their political affiliation and also co-existed in government policies, there were nevertheless, differences in orientation among partisans of the two ideologies. Eventually these differences

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5 ibid, pp. 153-154, 158-160. Simon maintains that the British did relatively little to ascertain the root of the problems and punish those responsible, partly due to their desire to deflect attention away from their return to active participation in internal Iraqi politics (pp. 158, 160).
6 ibid, pp. 161-162.
7 ibid, p. 163. Satib al-Husri himself was stripped of his Iraqi citizenship and deported (ibid).
8 Haj, p. 111.
came to be drawn along the lines separating the left-wing, incorporating the Iraqi nationalists and Communists, and the right-wing, including those of pan-Arab persuasion, such as the Ba'thists and Nasserists. Strong and often violent antagonism developed between the two sides. The Arab nationalists, dominated by the Ba'th Party, finally gained power in 1963 through another coup, thus ending the representational form of government.

The new authoritarian government subsequently initiated the "physical elimination" of its political rivals. The first five years of the new regime were very chaotic, with numerous cabinet changes, and the attention of the politicians was focused on consolidating their own positions, rather than solving the social and economic problems of the country. Then in 1968, various factors produced a political environment that was ripe for a single party or group to take control, and the Ba'th Party, having gained the backing of the military, seized the opportunity. Over the course of the following few months, the Ba'th assured its hegemony though the suppression or absorption of political opposition groups and through careful replacement of suspect members of the military with Ba'th supporters. The Ba'th Party was based on the principles of pan-Arabism, socialism, and anti-imperialism, and, after its rise to power, it worked to prove its commitment to these causes, in which it succeeded to a certain extent. With the nationalization of the oil industry in 1972, the Ba'th Party both boosted its prestige among Iraqi citizens --counterbalancing to a degree its unpopularity-- and also gained the financial resources to undertake many civil projects and extend its reach into the lives of all Iraqis. In fact, with the skyrocketing of international oil prices, oil increased its value ten times between 1972 and 1974, and the state's income from oil increased almost tenfold between 1973 and 1978. As a result, the party was in a position to distribute patronage, which bought for the regime a base of support among businessmen.

10ibid, pp. 51, 60-61.  
11The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) reported that by 1961 over 285 party members and party sympathizers had been killed by Arab nationalist "hit squads" and that many thousands of families had been forced from their homes due to threats of violence (ibid, p. 65). The ICP-dominated government, too, engaged in retaliatory strikes against its political enemies, harshly repressing dissident voices, which often silenced popular expressions of discontent and discredited the participatory government (Haj, pp. 136-137).  
12Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, p. 85.  
13ibid, pp. 95, 101.  
14ibid, pp. 107-108.  
15ibid, p. 117.  
16ibid, pp. 123, 149-150.  
17ibid, p. 172, 179.
contractors, and entrepreneurs, as well as improving the general standard of living in Iraq. Among other ventures, however, such as road building and the development of both the public and private sector, the new-found wealth was also used to acquire "the latest technologies of coercion" and to build a sophisticated surveillance system, armed forces, private militia, and secret police. But the internal security and stability brought to Iraq by oil wealth was soon challenged by the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war. Border conflicts with Iran had been intermittent since 1969, but following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, relations between the two neighbours had worsened. Minor border incidents erupted into all-out war in 1980. The war lasted eight years --therefore placing it outside the scope of the main presentation of this paper-- with great cost to both countries, including massive numbers of deaths and the loss to Iraq of its oil fields in the region of Basra.

Although the Iraqi Ba'ath Party was inspired by the Syrian Ba'ath Party, the Ba'hist tradition was much less well developed in Iraq than in Syria. Therefore, even by the time of the 1963 coup, disparate visions among the Iraqi party members remained, and the party had little in the way of a concrete plan of action, though, as with the Syrian Ba'ath, it maintained a pan-Arab vision. In 1968, however, after gaining supreme control over the country, it became clear that the Iraqi Ba'ath party's fundamental pan-Arab orientation would have to co-exist and even be subordinate to the promotion of a particularly Iraqi identity. This was primarily due to the continuingly factionalized nature of Iraqi society: the Shi'i population remained the majority in Iraq and had a history of disaffection with the government, due to central policies of marginalization and confrontation; since the inception of Iraq, the Kurds had continued to press, with varying degrees of ferocity, for autonomy in the northern provinces; and, recently, there had additionally developed a pro- and anti-Syria split from within the Ba'ath Party itself. In addition, the Assyro-Chaldean Christians of Iraq were the third largest community (after the Arabs and Kurds) and,

18 ibid. p. 173.
19 Haj, pp. 137-138. Many means were employed to assure loyalty to the regime, including forced migrations, mass deportations, executions, the use of chemical gases, imprisonment, and torture (ibid).
21 Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, p. 259.
22 ibid. pp. 91-92.
23 Baram, p. 15. Baram notes the internal confusion at work within the Ba'ath Party as it struggled to reconcile its pan-Arab ideology with its opposition to Nasser and the Syrian Ba'ath and, consequently, its promotion of Iraqi exceptionalism (pp. 22-23).
thus, the Ba'thists could not afford to alienate them. All of this served to highlight the necessity of fostering a unifying Iraqi identity. In order to promote a uniquely Iraqi past and sense of community, the Ba'th turned to the heritage and images of Iraq's ancient Mesopotamian heritage in order to produce myths and heroes that might appeal to its diverse citizenry. In addition to sponsoring archeological projects and awareness, the government undertook the introduction of ceremonies, names, and symbols, as well as Islamic and pre-Islamic dating systems, into Iraqi administration, politics, and culture. Festivals, journals, literature, academic studies and programs, fine arts, and official emblems all celebrating the Mesopotamian culture were initiated or encouraged by the government and represented the heritage of Iraq's many regions and native civilizations, including the Babylonians, Sumerians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and others. The government also took steps to reach out to both the Shi'is and the Kurds, while making clear the unacceptability of organized dissension, revolt, or separatism. Therefore, the party negotiated several agreements with the Kurds that provided cultural safeguards and a degree of political autonomy, though these often remained words on paper, and at the same time sought to squash any Kurdish rebellion. The Iraqi government's use of Mesopotamian symbolism and myth became particularly overt with the rise to power of Saddam Hussain, who concentrated power in himself and a small group of his subordinates between 1975 and 1979.

The Assyrians, as did the Kurds, experienced varying relations with the central government, depending on their degree of acquiescence or resistance. As noted above, the Assyrian community remained the primary pariah of mainstream Iraqi society into the 1940s, due in large part to their involvement in the British victory against the Iraqi army in 1941, a victory that led to the re-occupation of the country by its much-resented former mandate ruler. In addition, during the fighting many Iraqi soldiers were killed by the defending levy forces. In 1945, it appears relations had little improved as the Assyrian leadership approached the US representative in Baghdad to convey their desire to escape Iraqi

24 *ibid*, p. 25. Mesopotamian themes had been used before, particularly by the regime of Abd al-Karim Qasim, but had not been a constant feature of the political scene (*ibid*, p. 28); nor does it appear that it was used as extensively or as systematically as under the Ba'th.

25 The variety and chronology of these programs are detailed in Baram.

26 *Farouk-Sluglett* and *Sluglett*, p. 179; *Simon*, p. 167.

27 As discussed in *Andrews*, p. 27.

28 The memo written to the US Secretary of State by the Secretary of Legation in Baghdad accompanying the letter of the Assyrians considers the letter to be "the fruit of long consultation and is the final agreement of the
authority, even should that entail emigration. In fact, the events of 1941 are mentioned in their petition as the catalyst that intensified the already long-standing hatreds between the Assyrians and the majority Iraqi community. More than simply heightening the antagonism of the Arab majority, however, the fall-out from 1941 appeared to unite the Assyrians of Iraq in their fear of reprisal and desire to leave Iraqi authority. The international community, however, no longer had much interest in the situation of the Assyrians, particularly should it necessitate any solution that might require large-scale upheaval, due to the failure of other attempts of finding a workable solution, the estimated costs involved, the disruption that might ensue in the region (including the consequent resentment of the majority Arab population), and the shift in theoretical thinking with respect to minorities and assimilation. As such, the choices facing the Assyrians were either to remain in Iraq or to emigrate as individuals.

Those Assyrians who chose to remain in Iraq were dispersed among various settlements, and some migrated to large urban centres. The stronghold of the Assyrians in Iraq, however, remained in the north of the country, largely in the Mosul district, which was also one of the important oil producing regions. Here, the greatest danger posed to the Assyrians was the on-going conflict between the government and the Kurds. The Assyrians, living in proximity to the Kurds, “either freely identified with the Kurds or had no other choice but to throw in their lot with them from fear of reprisal”.

Although the authorities of the region, past and present, whether Ottoman, British, or Arab, had invariably been forced to come to terms with the fiercely independent Kurds, the period after World War II saw an intensification of government-Kurd hostilities. The repressions, massacres, reprisals, and forced migrations visited upon the Kurds under the various regimes, also impacted the Assyrians, either as victims caught in the “crossfire” or as casualties of government action intended for Kurds, because the Iraqi forces often did not distinguish between the two populations. After the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq

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most intelligent Assyrians of Iraq who would be the leaders of their people in the immediate future” (as reprinted in ibid, p. 26).

29ibid, p. 28.

30As demonstrated in ibid, pp. 27, 28, 29.

31On this last point, the new double-pronged orientation of the international community was towards an emphasis on universal individual human right versus communal rights and also towards the stabilization of volatile states via the assimilation (which would occur naturally) of any disparate elements. See comments in Joseph, Modern Assyrians, pp. 236-237; Esman and Rabinovich, pp. 7, 14.


33ibid.

34ibid.
war in 1980, many Iraqi Kurds living in border areas were suspected of aiding the enemy and were re-
settled, particularly if they inhabited oil-producing areas;\textsuperscript{35} it may well be that Assyrian villages in similar
situations were treated in a similar manner. In particular, during the Iraqi government’s campaign against
the Kurds in 1988, called the \textit{Anfal} (which included the employment of methods such as mass re-
locations, abductions, and the use of poison gas against civilians), many Assyrians (and others) met the
same fate as their Kurdish neighbours.\textsuperscript{36} As a result of their own convictions and aspirations, therefore, as
well as the near-impossibility of remaining unaffected by the political situation despite their own political
loyalties, some Assyrians actively participated in the struggle against the government.\textsuperscript{37} Though detailed
information is scarce, at least one Assyrian party came into being within the time frame of this paper: the
Assyrian Democratic Movement (\textit{Zo’u}) was founded in 1979, with a declared goal of solidifying “the
bases of our national existence in our ancestral homeland”.\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Zo’u} continues to maintain close ties with
the Kurdish movement and has gained enough popular support that the party won four of the five seats
allotted to Christians in the elections for the Kurdish autonomous zone established after the 1991 Gulf
War.\textsuperscript{39} The Assyrians’ situation in Iraq, in terms of their on-going tensions with the Iraqi government,
was a product of their communal history and expectations and, therefore, not necessarily indicative of the
position of other Christian groups in the country. The Chaldeans especially forged positive relations
relatively easily with the central authorities, despite their strong representation in opposition groups such
as the Iraqi Communist Party.\textsuperscript{40} In contrast, the difficult history between the Assyrians and the Iraqi
government led to the association of the very name “Assyrian” with rebellion against central authority,
and, as a result, most other Christian communities strove to distance themselves from it.\textsuperscript{41}

Most Assyrians, however, apparently did not continue to resist integration into the Iraqi system.
As well as the danger inherent in opposing the government, especially after the nationalization of the Iraqi
Petroleum Company (providing the Ba’th Party with augmented resources to produce political
acquiescence), the Iraqi government worked to incorporate minority groups through various enticements. In addition to the majority Arab community, certain minority groups were granted official recognition by the government. And although the Assyrians were technically excluded from this because their Patriarch resided outside of Iraq, they, nevertheless, enjoyed most of the privileges of official status. Furthermore, as part of its efforts to unify the country through the celebration of a Mesopotamian heritage, the government gave license to the Syriac-speaking community to establish cultural clubs and organizations, radio programs and magazines, and the state itself established an academy for the preservation and academic study of the Syriac language. In 1972, in a move parallel to an agreement reached with the Kurds, Syriac was officially recognized as one of the languages to be used for primary school instruction in areas where the majority of students were Syriac-speaking. Moreover, the extensive use of ancient Mesopotamian imagery to foster support for the Ba'ath regime and to advance a sense of a unique “Iraqi” identity was sure to “steal the thunder” of any who attempted to promote advance a rival sense of Assyrian or Assyro-Chaldean identity. Figures such as Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar and symbols such as the epic of Gilgamesh and Assyrian winged bulls became prominent features of official Iraqi imagery; and units of territory were “Mesopotamianized”, as the province of Mosul was re-named Nineveh and that of al-Hilla was re-named Babylon. Saddam Hussein emphasized “unity-in-diversity” and simultaneously urged Iraqi citizens to celebrate the variety of the Iraqi past without categorizing it based on ethnic difference. As such, the particularly Assyrian (or Assyro-Chaldean) contributions to Mesopotamian history were subsumed under the larger heading of “Iraqi (Arab) heritage”, thus nullifying their potential to symbolically represent Assyrian identity alone. Moreover, it is very possible that the official use of Assyrian culture realized the government’s intentions and facilitated the identification of the Assyrian community with the larger Iraqi entity. On the political level as well, minorities were not

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42In the late 1960s and early 1970s the government gave recognition to the existence of Arabs, Kurds, and unspecified “others” as the communities that made up Iraqi citizenship; in 1972, these “others” were specified as Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syriac (Le Coz, p. 384). The impact of this recognition is uncertain, however, as during the 1980s there emerged as trend to limit ethnic identifications, as demonstrated by the 1987 census, which gave only the options of “Arab” or “Kurd” as choices for ethnicity (Human Rights Watch, pp. 7, 243).

43Joseph, Nestorians, p. 216.


45Joseph, Muslim-Christian, p. 117.

46As recorded throughout Baram, including p. 62.

prevented from participation. Already in 1924, the Constitution of mandate Iraq provided for freedom of worship and for equal representation in the electoral system (in the sense that all elected representatives enjoyed equal privileges), and in the same year, the Electoral law assigned four parliamentary seats each to the Christian and Jewish communities.\textsuperscript{48} Although confessional representation was brought to an end by the 1958 revolution, Christians continued to attain positions of prominence in the government and military, though they were few in number.\textsuperscript{49} Regardless of the effectiveness of any one of these forces for incorporation, it appears that in combination they worked to ease the Assyrians into place as members of Iraqi society. The final disbanding of the Assyrian levies in 1955 came as a relief to the community in general, and most of the levies went on to serve in the Iraqi army.\textsuperscript{50} By the 1960s, young Assyrians were eager to learn Arabic, and Syriac even fell into disuse, due to its perceived ignominy.\textsuperscript{51} Even when the cultural privileges of the Assyrians were once again restricted after 1975,\textsuperscript{52} following the renewal of hostilities between the government and the Kurds, it did not produce a widespread revolt among Assyrians, as demonstrated by their high level of participation in the war against Iran in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{53}

\textbf{Iran}

The country of Iran did not experience the same level of continuous upheaval after the Second World War as did Iraq, though it did, nevertheless, undergo several dramatic changes. both country-wide and also in the province of Azerbaijan, the location of the Iranian Assyrians. Ostensibly due to Iran’s reluctance in breaking off ties with Germany once war had erupted in Europe, Britain and Soviet Russia once again occupied the country in 1941, as a temporary security measure for important supply routes.\textsuperscript{54} Reza Shah was deposed by the Allied powers, and his son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (known as Muhammad Reza Shah, r. 1941-1979) was installed as the nominal ruler.\textsuperscript{55} During the time of the

\textsuperscript{48}Betts, pp. 35, 182.
\textsuperscript{49}\textit{ibid}, pp. 183-184. This is partly due, of course, to the new executive system installed by the Ba’th Party, as the elected parliament was dissolved in 1968 and the Revolutionary Command Council, naturally composed of a small number of Ba’th members, was given ultimate legislative and executive powers.
\textsuperscript{50}Joseph, \textit{Nestorians}, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{51}\textit{ibid}, pp. 218-219. Joseph attributes this notion to the success of national public education, compulsory military service, and the requirements of modern communications (p. 219).
\textsuperscript{52}Dadesho, p. 221; Yacoub, \textit{Assyrian Question}, pp. 191-192.
\textsuperscript{53}Dadesho, p. 226; Yacoub, \textit{Assyrian Question}, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{55}Lapidus, p. 583.
occupation, however, a separatist revolt broke out in Azerbaijan, led by the local communist Democratic Party. Russia aided the revolt by denying Iranian troops access to the region and by encouraging local Assyrians and Armenians to support the Party. An independent government was established in Azerbaijan, and the rebellion also spread into the neighbouring Kurdistan. The United Nations finally compelled Russia to leave Iranian territory in May 1946, and following the withdrawal, the Azerbaijani Parliament agreed to accept status as a provincial government within Iran, but only after receiving certain guarantees (which applied to all inhabitants alike: Azerbaijanis, Assyrians, Armenians, etc.), including instruction in Kurdish for the region's Kurds. Shortly thereafter, however, the government forcibly re-captured the region, bringing political and social chaos to the province.

Although the foreign occupation of Iran may not have been popular among its citizens, the period between the departure of Reza Shah and the re-emergence of a strong monarchy in 1953 was a time of increased political freedoms: political prisoners were freed, meetings freely held, a large number of political parties were formed, and publications were no longer subjected to censorship. With the rise to power of the National Front, a coalition of four parties, its head, Muhammad Mosaddeq, a liberal nationalist, pressed for the nationalization of Iranian oil in 1951. However, in 1953, internal disputes within the National Front and the Western boycott of Iranian oil following its nationalization forced Mosaddeq to resign as Prime Minister and paved the way for a coup, supported by the US. that returned Muhammad Reza Shah to absolute rule. Though Iran was technically a constitutional monarchy, by 1955 Muhammad Reza Shah had gained virtually absolute power. As had his father, the monarch pursued an aggressive policy of modernization along Western lines and sought the establishment of a secular, centralized, and nationalist regime. The cornerstone of the Shah's endeavours was the “White Revolution” of 1963, a six-point program of reform, affecting everything from land ownership and industry, to literacy and health. The implementation of the reforms brought hardship to many Iranians.

\[57\] ibid, pp. 210-211.
\[58\] ibid, p. 212.
\[59\] ibid, p. 213.
\[60\] Ramezanadeh, p. 81.
\[61\] ibid, p. 85.
\[62\] Lapidus, p. 585.
particularly the rural and agriculturally-based masses. The decrease in the standard of living of many, in addition to the steps taken towards a Western-style emancipation of women and the Shah's dependence on foreign support, earned him widespread domestic disapproval among intellectuals, merchants, artisans, peasants, and the 'ulama. In 1964, the popular preacher Ayatollah Khomayni had been exiled for his criticism of the regime, and by the early 1970s he had refined his political views to advocate rule by the 'ulama, and he urged Iranians to struggle for the end of the monarchy as an un-Islamic institution and for political reform. The large-scale discontent on the part of Iranians with the regime and the religiously-inspired opposition translated into a mass movement for change. In 1978, there erupted demonstrations in Qum that soon established a cyclical pattern of protest that grew to involve millions of people. The revolt against the Pahlavi regime paralyzed the country and the Shah fled the country. Khomayni returned to Iran as the highest authority of the new theocratic regime, which was established in 1979.

The years immediately after the Islamic Revolution were not easy for the government, as both Iranian Kurds and Turcomen seized the opportunity to attempt to wrest autonomy from the state and as Iraq sought to extend its control over oil producing areas and to prevent the spread of the Revolution to its own soil by initiating military hostilities that became the prolonged Iran-Iraq War. Nevertheless, the governing 'ulama endured, and they successfully re-constructed Iranian society on bases very different from that of the Pahlavis, in that they restored a religiously-inspired structuring of society, in opposition to the goal of secularism envisioned by Muhammad Reza Shah.

The policies of Muhammad Reza Shah largely continued the work begun by his father, with the addition of speed. While Reza Shah sought the modernization of Iran, Muhammad Reza Shah pursued an "overnight" transformation of the country. As such, the work of the Pahlavi regime after World War II was ambitious and far-reaching. Transportation, industrialization, and centralization were all, as under his father, significant themes during Muhammad Reza Shah's rule, and all of which served to aid in the dismantling of the traditional boundaries that maintained Iran as a geographically isolated, and, therefore, 

63 Ibid., pp. 585-586. By the early 1960s, approximately seventy per cent of Iran's citizens were still rural dwellers (Ramezanzadeh, p. 87).
64 Lapidus, p. 586.
65 Ibid., p. 588; Ramezanzadeh, p. 85-86.
66 Lapidus, p. 589.
67 Ramezanzadeh, p. 94.
as regionally-oriented, society. The ameliorations in communications and transportation combined with
the increase of state revenues under the Pahlavis (from the nationalization of the oil industry) meant that
the central authorities were able to touch peoples previously secluded from the reach of Tehran. Though
this did not mean the end of regionally-based ethnic differences, it did bring various minority groups
under the control of the government, typically through the intimidation and co-optation of the minority
elites. Although the success of the reforms and ventures is debatable, considering the mass
disenfranchisement and suffering they appear to have caused, it is obvious that they paved the way for
the following regime to extend its control over the entire country. Education as well continued to play an
important role in the policies of the second Pahlavi Shah: education at all levels was expanded, though,
again, predominantly in the urban areas, and literacy increased. Moreover, although many of the
reforms pursued by Muhammad Reza Shah had been initiated by his father, much of the work of the elder
Reza Shah did not come to fruition until the reign of his son. For example, it had been Reza Shah who
sought to instill a sense of Iranian national identity, but during his time, nationalism had remained the
property of the elite and the few. In contrast, by the 1950s, there existed a more popular base for Iranian
nationalism. This was partly due to the changing socio-economic realities of Iran, which altered the
interests of several prominent segments within Iranian society so that they gradually came into line with
nationalist-type goals, and also that other “nationalistically-inclined” classes regained a measure of unity
and, therefore, political clout under Muhammad Reza Shah. But it is also likely that the educational
endeavours of Reza Shah, with his goal to promote national identity through the schools and which had
impacted a small minority of Iranians, also worked to aid the spread of nationalism in the second half of
the twentieth century. As it would have been the children of the urban notables and elite that received the
benefit of the Shah’s educational policy, they, the elite and leaders of the generation under Muhammad
Reza Shah, would have been imbued with the strong nationalist vision. The ground-breaking efforts to

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68 See comments by Sanasarian, p. 15.
69 Ibid., p. 16.
70 See, for example, ibid, pp. 86-92.
71 Ibid., p. 92.
72 Cottam, p. 25.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., pp. 39-42, 43-44, 50.
75 Although Sanasarian asserts that the educational reforms did not appear to induce non-ethnic-Iranians to
embrace a “Persianized” identity, as evidenced by the linguistic diversity that persisted at the end of the Pahlavi
unify and centralize Iran's economy, too, were begun under Reza Shah, but their contribution to the development of a unified Iranian identity were not seen until after his abdication.\textsuperscript{76}

With the downfall of the monarchy and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the focus of the Iranian government underwent changes in orientation. As a theocracy, the government of Iran was to be based on Islamic principles (as interpreted by the leading Iranian 'ulama) and the country was to embody an Islamic society. The constitution of 1979 declared the country to be a Twelver Shi'i state, and the 1980s were a period of overhaul, in terms of bureaucracy, education, and government.\textsuperscript{77} But factionalism of the new leadership combined with more conservative readings of Shi'i Islam also meant that the early years of the Republic were a time of chaos for many: there began a "reign of terror and virtue". as the government intensified its involvement in people's private lives and initiated a campaign of "cleansing".\textsuperscript{78}

For non-Muslim minorities specifically, the advent of the Islamic Republic entailed a re-definition of their status. The rise of the clerical class to power put an end to the Pahlavi secularization of Iranian identity, as appeals for loyalty to the state became grounded in terms of Islamic unity and were accompanied by promises regarding the afterlife.\textsuperscript{79} In addition, the school curriculum was altered so as to reflect the new religious emphasis of the day: pre-Islamic history was reduced to a bare minimum, while hours spent on religious subjects were multiplied; and the citizenry of the county was no longer referred to as the Iranian community, but as the Islamic community.\textsuperscript{80} Moreover, as Iran was to reflect its faith in all its structures, the Islamic regulations regarding non-Muslims were also revived, thereby reversing the Pahlavi policy on external homogenization of all Iranians.\textsuperscript{81} Once again the legal category of dhimmi was used to designate non-Muslims, and various regulations were put in place regarding the segregation or suppression of non-Muslims in order to maintain Muslim dominance and purity.\textsuperscript{82} Religious minorities were subjected to

\textsuperscript{76}Cottam, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{77}Sanasar\textsuperscript{\textregistered}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{78}\textsuperscript{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{79}Vaziri, p. 199. Islamic identity was to surpass all other forms of identity, such as geographical, linguistic, ethnic, etc. (Sanasar\textsuperscript{\textregistered}, p. 30).
\textsuperscript{80}Vaziri, p. 199.
\textsuperscript{81}Sanasar\textsuperscript{\textregistered}, p. 73. Unlike the previous regime, the Islamic Republic accepted diversity, but only among non-Muslims and only as part of a policy of subordination of non-Muslims.
\textsuperscript{82}\textsuperscript{ibid.} pp. 23-24. Sanasar\textsuperscript{\textregistered} additionally notes the importance of the notion of nejasat ("pollution") in Shi'i Islam, that is, the impurity of non-Muslims and its transferability to Muslims through contact (p. 23).
official scrutiny of their communal lives, and their members experienced social discrimination, including in employment. At the same time, however, certain communities were granted status as officially recognized religious minorities, including the Jews, Armenians, Zoroastrians, and Assyro-Chaldeans, and were given representation in the Majlis, and there were few restrictions placed on freedom of worship.

The re-emergence of religiously-based rule, therefore, did not automatically mean the complete and unwavering persecution of all non-Muslims. This was partly due to the ambivalent stance of Islamic tradition itself towards those outside the faith, evidencing both acceptance and rejection, and also partly to the complex mix of religious and political pressures in Iran, producing often ambiguous attitudes on the part of the clerics towards dhimmis, being protective and tolerant in one instant and authoritative and inflexible the next. Moreover, the relations between the state and minorities, particularly non-Muslims, was not a constant, but rather shifted over time in response to the larger situation of the country.

As noted previously, the Iranian Assyrians had been single-minded, and virtually united, in their desire to return to their homelands after the displacement of World War I, and the majority had largely regained their lives in Urmia by 1922. The revolt of Azerbaijan, however, at the end of World War II, brought serious disruption to the Assyrians. Not only were they, along with the Armenians, directly encouraged to participate in the rebellion by the Russians and, therefore, liable for reprisals by the central government, but, additionally, during the political anarchy that ensued after the dismantling of the independent government, the violence was often sectarian in nature and Christians were singled out for exactions. The violence and chaos of the region compelled most Assyrian inhabitants to leave Urmia for the larger cities of Iran. The support, both historical and contemporary, given by the indigenous Christians in the province of Azerbaijan to Russia inspired the resentment of the majority of Iranians, as did the evident Christian participation in the Azerbaijan Autonomous Republic. Once installed in urban

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81ibid, pp. 87-88.
83ibid, pp. 30-33; Menashri, "Khomeini’s Policy", p. 223.
84For example, the government was more lenient towards non-Muslim freedoms during the early years of the Republic, but after the war with Iraq erupted, restrictions gradually mounted (see Sanasarian, pp. 76-82).
85Dadesho, p. 176.
86Joseph, Nestorians, p. 213.
87ibid.
88See Cottam’s remarks, pp. 79-80, 82.
centres, however, the Assyrians were much better able to melt into the mix of peoples, thereby attracting less negative attention. By the 1960s, the increased economic and political security offered by urbanization encouraged younger Assyrians to identify with the rest of Iranian society and to hope and strive for the betterment of their country. In fact, it was their integration into Iranian society during the decades prior to the Islamic Revolution that distinguished the Assyrians from their Armenian co-religionists, for unlike the Armenians, the Assyrians hoped “only to live peacefully with their neighbours” and did not seek autonomous rule. The nationalizing aims of the Pahlavi regime may have influenced the Iranian Assyrians sufficiently that they conducted themselves as “Iranians”. But it is also likely that the small size of the Assyrian community aided in their being well-received by mainstream society, as they were apparently accepted by both Iranian and Kurdish nationalists.

Under the early Islamic Republic, the Assyrians, together with the Chaldeans, formed one of the recognized religious minorities (RRMs), and, as such, were entitled to one parliamentary representative between them. RRM deputies were given equal privileges as their Muslim counterparts in the Majlis and could speak on any subject, not simply those that affected their or other minority communities; and, despite the Assyrian community’s historical lack of participation in Iranian movements, the Assyro-Chaldean deputy was the most vocal of the RRM representatives in the sessions of the first Assembly. This was quite possibly due to the relatively stable relations the Assyrian community enjoyed with the government and Iranian society in general, in contrast to the Armenians, who had long-established antagonisms with the central Iranian authorities, or the Jews, who held the most precarious position due to their presumed ties with Israel and Zionism. The Iran-Iraq war provided the RRM representatives with opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the regime, and so, although many emigrated or sent their sons abroad to

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91 Joseph, Nestorians, p. 213.
92 Cotam, p. 82.
93 Cotam notes a missionary report from the 1970s stating that the Assyrians were generally loyal to the government (pp. 82-83).
94 There were expressions even of sympathy for the Assyrian community by the writer Dolatabadi, whose work generally reflected contemporary nationalist attitudes, while the Kurdish nationalist societies, closed to all non-pure-blooded Kurds, would make exceptions for individuals having Assyrian maternal parentage (ibid, pp. 82-83).
95 Sanasarian, p. 70. All the RRM deputies, however, tended to participate only minimally in discussions regarding national affairs, though they were usually called upon for comments in regards to matters affecting their communities (ibid, p. 98).
escape military service, those who remained donated funds and supplies for the war effort, in addition to serving on the front lines. In fact, population losses due to the war were particularly high among Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans. Furthermore, for the duration of the war, RRM religious celebrations were observed at a subdued level, poems were written on those killed, and the Shi'i-inspired Iranian parlance concerning the war was adopted, as in the naming of those killed in the war effort "martyrs". This all likely served to reinforce the sense of solidarity between the RRM and the Iranian Muslim majority, as well as to stave off attempts at scapegoating. The success of the Assyrians in maintaining cordial relations with the state is perhaps best demonstrated by the acceptability of the name "Assyrian". The term "Assyrian" was used by the Islamic Republic to designate the entire Assyro-Chaldean community. Moreover, in contrast to the situation in Iraq, although many Chaldeans continue to reject incorporation into the "Assyrian" fold, even in a non-denominationally-specific sense, one author notes that many more choose to identify themselves as Assyrians, rather than as Chaldeans. The early years under the Islamic regime, therefore, brought generally good relations between the state and the Assyrians. But the subtle, and often not-too-subtle, official promotion of a Muslim-"us" versus non-Muslim-"them" by the government naturally pre-empted any Assyrian inclusion as part of mainstream society and, thus, resulted in a solidification of their distinct communal identity. This distancing between the Assyrians (and other minorities) and the Islamic state would only intensify in later years as the policy of Islamism became tethered to a pursuit of "Persianization" along the lines of the Pahlavi era.

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97Sanasarian, p. 143.
98ibid, p. 75.
99ibid, p. 143.
100ibid, p. 40-41. Sanasarian explains this as a move to categorize the Assyrians and Chaldeans as religious communities (and, therefore, linked as Syriac-speaking Christians) versus ethnic non-Muslim communities, which might serve as grounds for separate representation in the Majlis.
101ibid, pp. 41, 177.
102ibid, p. 75.
103ibid, pp. 73, 147.
104ibid, p. 81.
Assyrians in the Diaspora

While a substantial number of Assyrians opted to remain in their homelands and either work within or work to change their societies, many Assyrians chose to seek out political stability elsewhere and emigrated abroad. Assyrian emigration was not a phenomenon new to the twentieth century: even in the nineteenth century, Assyrians in search of better employment, education, or new opportunities had found their way to parts of Europe, particularly Russia, and to the United States. When northwestern Iran came under Russian control in the late nineteenth century, a significant number of Assyrian men moved north in search of jobs, both seasonal and permanent. The bulk of these early immigrants, however, would be more accurately understood to be migrant workers, who aimed to establish themselves financially and then return home within a few years. A similar pattern emerged with early migration to the US, which began after the mid-nineteenth century and increased contact between the community and US missionaries. One author notes that labour migration became so widespread that by 1900 many villages in Urmia were annually empty for many consecutive months. Some immigrants remained in their chosen countries, though, particularly after the devastation of the First World War, and eventually sent for their families; and it was these that became the seeds of the Assyrian diaspora.

The First World War and its aftermath brought a change to Assyrian emigration patterns and goals: with the political upheavals and uncertainties surrounding the war and the decades following, not only did the number of emigrants increase, but they now had the goal of settling elsewhere permanently. The rhythm of Assyrian immigration waves has generally reflected that of political developments in their homelands: as such, the 1920s (the period after World War I), 1970s (the intensification of Kurdish-Iraqi hostilities), and the 1980s (the establishment of the Islamic regime in Iran) were the peak periods of Assyrian migration to the US, though the "bleed" of indigenous Christians from the Middle East was a rather constant movement over the course of the twentieth century. Although the US and parts of Europe

106ibid.
110Ishaya, "Class and Ethnicity", p. 82; Al-Rasheed. pp. 72-75.
111Ishaya, "Class and Ethnicity", p. 60. The 1991 Gulf War also produced a rise of Assyrian emigration from Iraq.
(Russia, Britain, France) were common destinations for early Assyrian immigrants, a sizable community also formed in Syria (both as part of the events of 1933 and later) and Lebanon. In subsequent decades, the Assyrian diaspora spread all across the globe, with concentrations in much of Europe, Australia, and North America, as well as parts of South America. In fact, according to present day figures, the diaspora community outnumbers that of the homelands, holding over fifty percent of Assyro-Chaldeans.\textsuperscript{112}

The diaspora experience proved to be both challenging and beneficial for the Assyrian community, as it has for countless, if not all, other immigrants. The incentive pushing the post-World War I Assyrian immigrants to flee their homelands was the immediate threat to their physical, economic, and cultural security, and it is certain that the Assyrians found respite from imminent extinction, as they tended to migrate to countries with more liberal political contexts. But the increased freedoms encountered by the community abroad also carried the danger of extinction through assimilation. For example, some Assyrians deliberately conformed to the surrounding society, so as not to be perceived as "alien". This took place not only in areas of public life (in terms of dress, language used in public, etc.), but extended sometimes into the private domain, affecting such things as the type of food prepared at home, given and family names, and even the language spoken in the home.\textsuperscript{113} Others simply internalized gradually the social norms and customs of the majority; this applied in particular to the generations of Assyrians born outside the community's traditional homelands, who knew only the cultural environment of their adopted country.\textsuperscript{114} For example, in an anthropological study conducted in the 1990s among Assyrians living in the environs of London in the United Kingdom, it was discovered that the youth of the community had little or no knowledge of Syriac.\textsuperscript{115} The assimilation of the Assyrians into the culture of their new homes was likely encouraged by the reasons prompting their emigration and the views the members of the diaspora held regarding their settlement abroad. As most Assyrians leaving their original territories from the time of World War I and onward did so to escape hardships or repressions, the immigrants felt they had been "forced" out of their homes by the governments or societies under which

\textsuperscript{112}Joseph Yacoub, "La diaspora assyro-chaldéenne", \textit{L'Espace géographique} 23, no. 1, 1994, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{113}Ishaya, "Role of Minorities", p. 101; "Class and Ethnicity", p. 155-156, 201.
\textsuperscript{114}Ishaya, "Class and Ethnicity", p. 155.
\textsuperscript{115}Al-Rasheed, pp. 120, 121. These findings are interesting and so are included here, although information on the Assyrian community since 1980 falls outside the scope of this paper.
they lived. Few, therefore, cherished any real intent ever to return on a permanent basis. The corollary of this view, then, was that most saw their chosen country of residence as their new home and sought to begin their lives anew and to “prove” themselves as full members of society. The result was that although eventually the Assyrians sought recognition as a unique ethnic community, they generally resisted politicization, as nationalist claims were seen to potentially compromise their new identity as part of mainstream society. For instance, according to the same study mentioned above, Assyrian parents discouraged or forbade their children from participating in nationalist demonstrations, marches, or other gatherings. Another study reports similar findings regarding the opposition of established segments of the Assyrian immigrant community in California in the 1970s to attempts on the part of newly-arrived immigrants to politicize the community along nationalistic lines, for fear that the community might be discredited and lose the gains made in its level of socio-political acceptance.

Although some wholesale assimilation did occur, such a drastic change of cultural orientations appears to have been prevalent primarily among many of the earlier Assyrian immigrants who made the diaspora their permanent home. As the early immigrants were typically those members of the Assyrian community to have come into contact with Western influences even back in their homelands, usually in the form of foreign missionaries, they tended already to be partly Westernized before travelling abroad, or at least to be favourably oriented on the West. The disaffection of these Assyrians with their own way of life, combined with a positive view of the West, attuned this generation of immigrants to adopt more readily the culture of their chosen country. Over the course of the decades of the twentieth century, however, particularly after the First World War, the Assyrians became increasingly conscious of their existence as a community in a world of nations and ethnic groups, and a certain segment of the community was, additionally, increasingly frustrated by the apparent lack of interest of the West in their plight. The various experiences undergone by the Assyrian community during and after World War I, therefore, solidified their communal identity, an identity which was exported abroad with their emigration.

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116 ibid, pp. 72-75.
117 ibid, pp. 81-82.
118 ibid, p. 76.
119 Ishaya, “Class and Ethnicity”, p. 171.
120 ibid, pp. 64-73.
121 ibid, pp. 82-83. This sense of abandonment led to the prevalent view that the Assyrians had been betrayed by the Europeans, particularly by Britain, after the community had risked all to remain loyal to their supposed allies.
As such, later generations of Assyrian migrants held a strong desire to be recognized as a historic and viable people group.\textsuperscript{122} a desire which prompted the active preservation of their communal cultural heritage in foreign lands. This maintenance was aided in part by their patterns of settlement, as most Assyrian immigrants gravitated to areas where there already existed an established Assyrian group, or emigrated abroad as part of the departure of an entire social network (e.g. mass village migration).\textsuperscript{123} Several groups, therefore, were able to re-invent their lives abroad along similar lines as in their homelands, because the ability of the immigrant community to maintain communal patterns as regarded socialization, celebrations, worship, etc., was very strong.\textsuperscript{124}

In addition to small-scale, informal efforts on the part of the community to preserve their heritage, the Assyrian diaspora established many clubs, organizations, and associations. Almost from the time of the earliest landing of Assyrian migrants in the United States, the community organized itself to promote its language, culture, and education. Among the earliest country-wide associations to be formed were the Assyrian National Association (1915) and the Assyrian American Association (1917). Local communities in various countries established athletic and social clubs; many also built community centres to house any community or cultural events. Churches especially were common building projects for the Assyrian immigrants; these underlined the on-going denominational divisions within the Syriac-heritage community, as the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, the various Protestant groups, and others would each have their own place of worship.\textsuperscript{125} Radio stations, journals and magazines (printed in Syriac as well as in the language of the country), and unions were but some of the various means employed to retain and promote Assyrian self-awareness and solidarity. In addition to the socio-cultural organizations, the Assyrian diaspora also produced several political groups and associations, including the Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party (1976; located in the US), the Assyrian Democratic Organization, and the Assyrian Universal Alliance (1968; formed in France), as well as many smaller and locally-focused political organizations.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{122}Al-Rasheed, pp. 81-82.
\textsuperscript{123}Ishaya, “Role of Minorities”, pp. 75, 78, and “Class and Ethnicity” p. 237; Al-Rasheed, pp. 62, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{124}Economics appear to also have played an important role in the maintenance of Assyrian identity, as proposed by Ishaya in “Class and Ethnicity”. Indifference or intolerance shown towards the immigrant community by the established white population also encouraged the Assyrians to rely only on themselves and to strengthen their internal bonds (ibid, pp. 145, 146-147).
\textsuperscript{125}For example, ibid, pp. 37-38.
\textsuperscript{126}Al-Rasheed notes that among the Assyrians of London, there were five active political parties vying for the community’s attention (p. 77).
The aim of these political organizations and parties was typically to promote awareness of the Assyrians as a "national"/ethnic community and to demand cultural and ethno-national rights. In particular, the political organization of the North American-based Assyrian community culminated in the formation of the Assyrian National Congress, established in 1983 in California, an umbrella organization comprising a large number of Assyrian political parties and religious denominations and having stated objectives of: maintaining Assyrian unity and culture; promoting consciousness of the Assyrian people; re-asserting the community's "internationally recognized legal rights"; and forming an "Assyrian Guardians" defense force "to protect Assyrian people". Despite a plethora of activities at the local level, European Assyrians did not demonstrate the same level of country-wide organization as did the community in the United States.

The Assyrians' communal history and memory, particularly their recent experiences during and after World War I, combined with their exposure to the theories and practice of nations and nationalism (i.e. living in a world of self-described nations and nation-states), all laid the ground-work for a conceptualization of Assyrian identity in keeping with the contemporary definitions of a national community. For the Assyrians of the diaspora, the threat of assimilation prompted a renewed emphasis on Assyrian identity, and the increased freedoms offered by other countries also allowed them great possibilities to promote their culture and heritage. But it was not only their own desire to resist cultural extinction that prompted a conscious formulation of their identity. As an unknown people group to the Western populations, the Assyrians faced a constant need to explain their collective identity, as they wished to distinguish themselves from other Middle Eastern peoples, thereby requiring the community to be able to "explain" itself and its history. In explaining what constituted the Assyrian people, recourse was made to the "national" features of the community. Therefore, along with the preservation of the traditional elements constituting "Assyrian-ness", the language and concepts of "nations" and nationalism were also used to explain the situation of the Assyrian people. In other words, the socio-political

127: Yacoub, "La diaspora", p. 34.
128: References to internationally recognized rights usually pertain to the decisions of the League of Nations following World War I acknowledging the service of the Assyrians to the Allies and their traditional self-government and recommending that they continue as a politically autonomous people.
129: Al-Rasheed, p. 58.
130: ibid; Yacoub "La diaspora", p. 30.
environments of the diaspora, the accessibility of technology (particularly telecommunication), and the long-entrenched notions of communal particularity not only permitted the maintenance of Assyrian identity abroad, but also allowed (and even encouraged) its popularization in a new configuration. Specifically, these forces promoted the re-configuration of Assyrian identity along more secular lines and with an increased emphasis on the recognizable "national" characteristics. As such, over the course of the twentieth century, following World War I, the Assyrian community came to rely less on the Church of the East as marking the boundaries of the people, and more on the characteristics of language and ancestry, which highlighted the "national" qualities and heritage of the group. In keeping with the contemporary notions of national characteristics, the Assyrians pointed to their common and centuries-old use of Syriac and the belief of their descent from the ancient Mesopotamian peoples as the bases for their ethnic / "national" identity. These, of course, were the bases proposed in the nineteenth century by the Urmiyan intellectuals and had been re-iterated by Assyrian intellectuals from that time forward. But the impact of these ideas on the majority of Assyrians had been minimal, until their "consciousness raising" experiences of the war, refugeehood, participation in the levies, and then dispersion in the world. For the process of intra-communal interaction begun in the refugee camps in Iraq had continued in the diaspora, as many Assyrians became cognizant of their similarities across previous regional divides and their common differences with the surrounding societies. Furthermore, unlike their brethren who remained in the home countries, the diaspora community was able to articulate its new conception of Assyrian identity without fear of government reprisals and had many means at its disposal to disseminate the ideas (journals, radio, societies, schools, and even television).

As a logical out-growth of the centring of their communal identity on language and ancestry, some Assyrians promoted the full realization of the secularization of the identity in an end to denominational differentiation. According to this view, the Assyrians shared language and ancestry not only with the Chaldeans, but also the Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, and even the Maronites, and, therefore, they should all be regarded as part of one "Assyrian" nation, though having a variety of religious practices. Again, this notion in itself was not novel and had been articulated much earlier, but

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132 For example, in the diaspora, Assyrians originating from Turkey, Iran, and Iraq realized they had more in common with each other than with other peoples (ibid, pp. 184-185).
the difference at this juncture of Assyrian history was its tie to means of mass dissemination (thereby offering the idea the potential of a much larger audience). Additionally, the inclusive sense of Assyrian identity became linked to the emerging nationalistic movement, which sought the establishment of a geopolitical Assyrian entity, as, oftentimes, advocates of such an inclusive definition of Assyrian identity were also the most active on the nationalist scene. There was, therefore, apparently for the first time, a demonstrable conception and movement of an Assyrian nationalism, as in keeping with modern theories on nations and their ideology. Interestingly, though the nationalists certainly had their counterparts in the homelands, the vast majority of the nationalistic effort was concentrated in the diaspora, thereby “flavouring” the diaspora identity with a secularized vision that did not have the same means of dissemination in the “old country”. The differentiation between Assyrian identity as based on the Church of the East and as based on language and ancestry is not to suggest that the notions of language and ancestry had not played important roles in the Assyrian self-conception prior to the later twentieth century, but rather that these elements took on new significance as the Assyrians came to define themselves as a “nation”, in keeping with the contemporary and popular conception of the human world as a constellation of national entities. Nor was the Church of the East suddenly “exiled” from its position at the centre of Assyrian identity. For the Church continued to be commonly regarded at a popular level as an irreplaceable pillar of the community; and the religious institution remained as one of the prominent authorities, if not the preeminent authority, in the life of the community. Religion, therefore, remained as a boundary marker for the community, but it now occupied a “lower rung” in the hierarchy of “national characteristics”, being but one part of the particular Assyrian constellation.\footnote{ibid.}

Nevertheless, although there was evidence of widespread acceptance of the newly-emphasized elements of language and ancestry as the bases of Assyrian identity, this did not translate into a widespread embracing of the nationalist movement. This was partly due to the continuing strength of denominationalism, which continued to distinguish the Assyrians and the other Syriac-heritage groups, as well as the maintenance of many other entrenched points of differentiation within the Assyrian community. As regarded the majority Assyrian opinion, although a growing number of Assyrians regarded their separation from other Syriac-heritage communities as unnecessary factionalism
(particularly with respect to the Chaldeans), many Assyrians still resisted becoming subsumed under a larger understanding of "Assyrian" that might incorporate other denominations\(^{134}\) (though this did not necessarily nullify affirmations that all Syrian churches were of a shared heritage). Moreover, incorporation into a "pan-Assyrian" entity was largely rejected by the members of the other denominations in question, though there was almost always a certain segment that welcomed it. Perhaps the most disappointing rejection of the inclusive identity came from the Chaldean community, the people historically closest to the Assyrians. Despite its acceptance among some Chaldeans, including members of the clergy, most appeared to remain aloof, most likely as a result of the strong disassociative stance of the Chaldean community in Iraq (as mentioned above). As the Chaldeans had developed closer ties with the Ba'thist regime, they became distinguished from the Assyrians in terms of economic status and political leanings; these denominational characteristics were carried through to the diaspora, where they continued to divide the Assyrians and Chaldeans at various points.\(^{135}\)

In addition, not just in terms of the persistent popular devotion to the Church of the East, many of the old divisions among Assyrians continued to be prevalent. For example, despite their increasing sense of commonality across traditional territorial divides, regionalism continued to separate the Assyrian community into smaller sub-groupings. In the aforementioned London study, the Iraqi Assyrians interviewed expressed their identification with Iranian Assyrians and emphasized their openness to cross-socialization; however, the two communities had their own cultural centres, and there were no organized forums for Iranian-Iraqi Assyrian interaction.\(^{136}\) Similar patterns were evident with other areas of division, with Assyrian communities noting the insignificance on a theoretical level of many differences, such as political orientation and economics / class, as compared to their bonds of language and heritage, but with these differences in reality playing very important roles in internally dividing the community.\(^{137}\)

\(^{134}\)See, for example, \textit{ibid}, pp. 114-116.

\(^{135}\)Ishaya, "Class and Ethnicity", pp. 98, 102, 106-109, 114-115.

\(^{136}\)Al-Rasheed, p. 185; Ishaya, "Class and Ethnicity", pp. 234-235. Ishaya also reports distinctions among the Assyrians of her study due their region of origin ("Class and Ethnicity", p. 88-89). In contrast, those Assyrians having undergone the "Habaniyya experience" during service in the Assyrian levies had developed a wider conception of the Assyrian community and strongly resisted regional or factional differentiation (\textit{ibid}, pp. 93-94). Moreover, Ishaya concludes that, due to their lack of extra-regional communal contact, the Iranian Assyrians in particular were much more prone to "parochial" outlooks, than the Iraqi Assyrians (\textit{ibid}, p. 94).

\(^{137}\)See for example, \textit{ibid}, pp. 87-88, 89, 91, 101. Oftentimes, these divisive elements were interlinked, as in the case of Ishaya's community of study in California. For instance, the late 1970s and early 1980s produced a new wave of Assyrian immigrants from Iraq; when these immigrants settled in established communities, the "old-
This was particularly the case for the views regarding of the ultimate goals of the community. For, while there was developing a vocal and increasing portion of the community that advocated nationalistic-type goals, including the ultimate return of the community to its homelands and the establishment of an autonomous Assyrian entity there, the majority of Assyrians shied away from such ambitious political ventures and appeared content to push for recognition in their new countries and perhaps seek better relations as a community with the governments of their ancestral lands. As such, on a theoretical level, the majority of Assyrians appeared to have accepted the conceptual foundations for a secularized, national consciousness, drawn along ethnic lines, though the majority remained un politicized in their “national” identity.

The process producing the edging out of the Church of the East from its pre-eminent position as the “gate-keeper” of Assyrian identity coincided with a reversal of the Church’s position on political involvement. As explored above, the Church of the East and its Patriarch were the historic representatives of the Assyrian community, both in spiritual and secular affairs, a pattern that was re-affirmed in the period of great upheaval for the community following World War I. During and after the war, the Patriarchal family continued to champion the Assyrian cause and was the internationally-recognized spokesperson for the community. Even as late as 1945, Patriarch Eshai Shimun continued to send petitions and reports to the United Nations in hopes of obtaining political safeguards for his people and the fulfillment of the international decisions recommending Assyrian autonomy. By 1948, however, the orientation of the Patriarch on the political situation of the Assyrians had inversed: in the inaugural issue of the new church magazine, Light from the East, the visits of the Patriarch to both the Iranian and Syrian embassies in Washington were reported, along with the intentions of the Patriarch to establish better relations with their governments. Although this change in political stance may have been hinted

138 Al-Rasheed, pp. 76-77.
139 Coakley, “Church of the East”, p. 187.
at earlier (for example, a petition sent to the UN in 1947 by the Patriarch made no mention of any national claims, appealing only for justice for those Assyrians in Iran who had suffered under the reprisals of the central government after the fall of the Azerbaijan Autonomous Republic). 1948 marked the end of the Patriarch's involvement in the political struggle of the Assyrians to achieve recognized nationhood. 140 Therefore, in a speech made to the Royal Central Asian Society of Britain in 1952 regarding the contemporary situation of his flock, the Patriarch emphasized the gains made by the Assyrians and the aid provided to them by their various governments, while diminishing any negative portrayals of Assyrian relations with the majority societies. 141 Furthermore, he advised the Assyrian community to "all adapt themselves to the circumstances, wherever they may be". 142 While some speculate that the reason for the reversal of Patriarchal policy was the constant failure of Mar Shimun's efforts to persuade the international community to act on behalf of the Assyrians, 143 the change of focus was also likely due in part to the total disarray of the Church of the East. The First World War had left the ancient church with a handful of experienced priests and only a few bishops; moreover, the Assyrian community lived for several years following the end of the war in a state of uncertainty and upheaval and then settled as a population scattered across the globe. The condition of the Church of the East prior to the war had not been vibrant, as most clergy were illiterate and knew only enough classical Syriac to perform the liturgy; 144 but with the terrible losses from the war, the church was in no condition to offer service to the Assyrian congregation. As the Patriarch was surely all too well aware of the state of the church, he must have realized its incapacity to fulfill its divinely-ordained tasks. According to traditional Syrian views as laid out in the early Syriac fathers, the Church as a whole was to act as a bridge between the divine and the temporal, between the eternal and the finite, in her structures, worship, and even physical presence; as the Church mediated the interaction between God and his creation, she therein "effected" salvation. With his theological training, the Patriarch must have been all too aware of this theological view, as well as the inability of his church to perform its role in the redemptive process. It is

140 ibid, p. 186
142 ibid, p. 157.
likely, therefore, with the apparent closing of the “Assyrian question” in international circles and the entrenchment of the Assyrian population in their respective countries, that Mar Shimun turned to put the “spiritual house” of his people in order.

From the late 1940s on, then, the Patriarch turned his attentions to the re-building of his church. One of the most pressing needs of the church was clergy, and through the 1950s and 1960s Mar Shimun consecrated bishops for India, Syria, and Lebanon. The first of these was in 1952 to appoint Mar Thoma as the Metropolitan of Malabar, the first bishop to be consecrated since 1921. The congregations in the West were also given attention, and the Patriarch acted as bishop to the parishes in the US. As the Patriarch was not able to visit all countries where there existed a need for a bishop, other ecclesiastical leaders stood in for him: in Iraq, Mar Khananisho, the Metropolitan, consecrated two bishops, and in Iran an Orthodox bishop was the only available candidate to consecrate priests and deacons for the church, as the country apparently had no Assyrian bishop until as late as 1962. The Patriarch also sought to revive the traditions of the church and re-build its community. In addition to translating and publishing the works of the church Fathers, the Patriarch made efforts to reach out to those Assyrians who had drifted away from the Church and to re-integrate them into the community’s religious life. A few printing presses were founded during this period, one in Trichur, India, and another in Mosul, Iraq, and two seminaries were established, in Syria (1948) and in Iran (sometime during the 1940s; somewhat short lived). In addition, the Patriarch himself oversaw the establishment of the Patriarchal Aramaic Institute in the US in 1950, a theological centre and printing house. In 1964, a visit of Mar Khananisho to the US allowed the convening of a synod for the first time in several decades. The product of the meeting between the Metropolitan and the Patriarch was profound: in efforts to modernize certain church customs, most likely to make adherence to the Christian life more accessible to Assyrians living in an international...

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146 ibid, p. 190.
147 There was a bishop consecrated for Iran by Mar Khananisho in 1953, but Coakley records that the bishop’s actual work is uncertain and that he eventually moved to Iraq (ibid, p. 189). As such, it appears likely that no real guidance was given to the Church of the East in Iran until the arrival of Mar Dinkha in 1962.
148 Anschiütz, p. 131.
149 Coakley, “Church of the East”, pp. 188, 189. The churches in several countries of the Middle East also maintained elementary schools for the teaching of Syriac (Norman A. Horner, A Guide to Christians Churches in the Middle East, Elkhart, IN: Mission Focus, 1989, p. 23), though their date of establishment is not provided in the sources consulted for this paper.
150 Yonan, p. 158.
setting, among other changes made, the Gregorian calendar and Latin date for Easter were adopted.\footnote{ibid, p. 191.} The move was significant, as not only did it illustrate the plan of the Patriarch to assist integration of the community into the larger world, but also as it was to lead to a schism within a few years. Integration into the larger Christian community was also a feature of the Church of the East’s activities, as ecumenical initiatives were undertaken.\footnote{For example, George M. Lamsa, a member of the Patriarchal Council, sat as an observer at the third session of the Vatican Council (ibid, p. 191).}

Despite the great gains made by the Church of the East in a short period of time, it continued to face several severe problems. Firstly, the priesthood remained an unpopular vocation among young people. Having received more education than previous generations of Assyrians, and with many living in affluent societies, the restrictions and dedication of the position did not appeal to younger Assyrians, a serious difficulty in light of the continuing shortage of clergy, the on-going fall-out from World War I.\footnote{Anschütz, p. 132.} Secondly, an internal revolt appeared in the church in 1968, led by an anti-Patriarchal faction in Iraq, and ostensibly in opposition to the 1964 synodical resolutions, though most likely having roots that extended several decades into Assyrian history.\footnote{Coakley, “Church of the East”, p. 191.} The “Old Calendarists”, as they came to be called, elected Mar Darmo (a.k.a. Mar Thoma, the Metropolitan of India) as a rival Patriarch, who, in turn, began to consecrate bishops in Iraq upon his arrival there in 1968.\footnote{ibid, p. 192.} After Mar Thoma Darmo’s death a year later, he was succeeded by Mar Addai, the schismatic Metropolitan of Baghdad. The Calendarists made early gains in Iraq at the official level, receiving recognition and ownership of several Church of the East properties; but when the Iraqi government realized the majority of Assyrians remained loyal to the Patriarch, it soon re-launched relations with Mar Shimun: the government asked Mar Shimun to write a letter to the Assyrians in Iraq exhorting them to be loyal citizens; the Patriarch complied, with the letter being published in the official media in February 1970; and, subsequently, after thirty-seven years of exile, the Patriarch was granted a visa and visited Iraq in the spring of that same year.\footnote{ibid, p. 193; Dadesho, pp. 197-198.} Moreover, the government immediately revoked its endorsement of the schismatics.\footnote{Coakley, “Church of the East”, p. 193.} The Calendarists, however, were
not defeated: they expanded outside of Iraq, establishing congregations in most places where there existed Assyrians, and remained as a separate body past the time frame of this paper. Thirdly, the Patriarch himself became the centre of great controversy, which ended with his assassination in 1975. The cause of the controversy was the Patriarch's decision to marry, in violation of the traditions of episcopal office. In January 1973, the Patriarch announced his resignation, but with no successor on the horizon, the bishops persuaded the Patriarch to remain for a period of a few more months; in August, however, Mar Shimun announced that he had married. He was then deposed by the bishops, but as Mar Shimun refused to accept their decision, a feud ensued between the episcopate and the Patriarch; eventually a synod of bishops allowed Mar Shimun to remain in office on an interim basis, and a synod was to rule in November on the question of marriage and the episcopate. Before the synod was ever convened, however, the Patriarch was shot at his home in San Jose, California, by David Malik Ismail, an Assyrian nationalist and the son of the famed Assyrian hero Malik Ismail. The assassination was a shocking end to a chaotic and confusing time for the Assyrian community, but it also hinted at the disillusionment of the Assyrian national movement with the Patriarchate and the distance that had grown up between these two sides of Assyrian expression. The death of the Patriarch also marked the end of the Shimun line, as Eshai Shimun had no nephew available to succeed him (though it is also questionable as to whether the bishops would have accepted one, as the hereditary nature of Patriarchal succession had also caused deep rifts in the church in recent years), and Mar Dinkha, bishop of Tehran, was elected as Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV in October 1976. Mar Dinkha continued in the steps of Mar Eshai Shimun, and continued the process of opening the Church of the East to the larger world (finalizing the church's repudiation of the name “Nestorian”; expanding ecumenical involvement, particularly with the Chaldeans; more liturgical and other reforms), and maintaining the policy of accommodation with Middle Eastern governments.

The growing divide between the Church of the East and the nationalistic element of the Assyrian community, as evidenced in the later twentieth century, was understandable when viewed from the perspective of their differing philosophical bases and goals. The nationalistic movement aimed to restore a

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158 See comments by *ibid*, p. 195.
160 For details, see Coakley, “Church of the East”, pp. 196-197.
viable Assyrian community (under various definitions) to its ancient homelands as an autonomous entity and move out of the "dark ages" in which the community had been since the fall of the glorious Assyro-Chaldean empires. The Church of the East, on the other hand, while it might also hope for the physical, material, and cultural well-being of the Assyrian people, had as its primary focus the re-union of the community with God. Moreover, as the Church did not share the nationalist conviction of the innate need of a distinct homeland for the continuation of the Assyrian people, it was perhaps not prepared to engage in activities that might endanger the community still living under authoritarian rule, and thus its stance of accommodation with various governments versus confrontation.161

The contentions between the Church of the East and the nationalist movement, however, did not eradicate the strong position that the church continued to hold in the configuration of Assyrian identity. It has already been mentioned above how the Church of the East continued to function as a pillar of community and a bastion of cultural distinctiveness for the Assyrians even with the widespread secularization of their communal self-image. A second manner through which the church participated in the national consciousness of the Assyrians was the promotion in nationalist discourse of church figures as heroes of the nation. This was particularly evident in the commemoration of religious martyrs as martyrs of the nation, who, according to the nationalist view, therein played the dual role of dying not only for their faith, but also for their national identity. The person of Mar Eshai Shimun was another such figure: despite the distance that developed between the Patriarch and the nationalist movement over later years, he continued to hold a place of esteem in nationalist memory as a result of his efforts after World War I and was "canonized" as a strong nationalist leader.162 Another means by which the church's relationship to the identity of the community aided in fostering the nationalistic raison d'être of the community was through its fueling of notions of divinely-inspired communal purpose and destiny. The notions of descent from the ancient Assyrians central to the secularized modern "national" Assyrian identity became melded in the minds of some to the biblical prophecies regarding Assyria in the Hebrew scriptures. For some Assyrians, for example, the passages in scripture dealing with Assyria demonstrate

161 This observation is not intended to point fingers at either position in terms of their perceived failings or potentially negative consequences of either, but rather to highlight the divergent understandings of what was considered essential to (meaningful) Assyrian survival.
162 For example, De Kelaita, p. 21.
God’s great concern for the Assyrian nation and its divinely-appointed necessary role in history.\textsuperscript{163} According to this view, then, the Assyrian nation cannot disappear, as it has been ordained by God to benefit humankind. Assyrian national identity, therefore, is seen to be grounded in the divine will, but in order for that will to be realized, the nation must possess certain “fundamental elements,” including a future, which, in turn, is dependent on material provision (including a homeland),\textsuperscript{164} recognition, and self-expression.\textsuperscript{165} In terms of cultural expression (including as the sustainer of the classical form Syriac), historical figures and heroes, and “chosen people” imagery, the Church of the East provided many elements at the core of Assyrian identity, even in its secularized and nationalistic forms. But the role of the church as a living receptacle of Assyrian culture and identity, representing for many a truly Assyrian form of religious expression, was not necessarily a strong assertion from the church itself, due to the more “universal” image of the theology regarding Christian body, regardless of the particularisms of its individual manifestations in the real world. For example, with the increased efforts on the part of Mar Eshai Shimun to re-build the Church of the East, efforts were made to re-establish stronger ties with the Christians of Syrian rite in India, the majority of whom were no longer of Syrian descent, but of Indian. As such, the Church of the East did not appear to want to commit itself to acting as representative of a particular “ethnic” or “national” group, though, naturally, it strove to maintain its ancient traditions that were derivatives and manifestations of Syrian culture.

Therefore, despite the secularization of Assyrian identity, the Church of the East continued to play a vital role in the Assyrian community, though a role that had changed in many ways. Firstly, in the new configuration of Assyrian self-understanding, the “position” of the church as a signifier of “ Assyrian-ness” was subordinated to the “ethnic” elements of language and ancestry. For, although notions of a common language, descent, religion, and homeland were the centuries-old building blocks of

\textsuperscript{163}Peter H. Talia,\textit{ Between Hope and Hopelessness}, n.p.: n.d., pp. 15, 40-41; Dadesho, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{164}The Assyrians’ return to the land plays an important role in Talia’s thinking, for the community’s “attachment to the land of our inheritance is an everlasting link” and embodies the return to the “glory of our mighty nation” (p. 46).
\textsuperscript{165}\textit{ibid}, p. 21. The indestructible link between spiritual purpose and national fulfillment is further demonstrated by Talia’s comments that the existence of the Assyrians solely as a religious group for many centuries was “a meaningless existence, an absurd existence” (\textit{ibid}, p. 53). Talia later underscores the interconnectedness of religious / spiritual activity and political and national ambitions when he writes that, although the church and political arenas should operate under separate authorities, they should support and assist each other, with the message of the church working to produce temporal change for the benefit of the nation (\textit{ibid}, pp. 89-91, 93).
Assyrian identity, as has been discussed above, the difference of the popular new configuration of the identity lay in its emphasis on language and descent as the primary gate-keepers to inclusion in the Assyrian community, rather than on adherence to the Church of the East. Previously, to enter into the fold of the Church of the East was to undergo a spiritual as well as a linguistic and ethnic "conversion", and to leave the Church was to leave the Assyrian community (hence, the existence of “Kurds” that remembered being Christian and “Assyrians’ that remembered speaking only Kurdish). In other words, the Church (or, religion in general) bestowed ethnicity. By the later twentieth century, however, the concepts of nations and nationalism had penetrated popular consciousness such that the necessity of basing ethnic identity on more “national” elements was acceptable to the majority of the Assyrian population, provided, of course, that the standing of the Church in the community was not endangered. Language and ancestry, therefore, came to the forefront as community boundaries. These elements had the dual advantage of demonstrating the “peoplehood” of the Assyrians, as well as providing them with a “recorded” ancient heritage. Other elements common to many nationalistic identities were also featured in the new secular configuration of Assyrian identity, but not with the same emphasis as blood and language, due to the particular circumstances of the Assyrian community. For instance, the notion of “homeland”, though important to Assyrians, could not play a decisive role in differentiating the community, as many other people groups claimed ties to the same territories and as the bulk of the contemporary Assyrian population lived outside of their homelands. Religion, for its part, continued to play a very important role in marking Assyrian identity, but a much more ambiguous role than before. For the most part, their adherence to Christianity continued to demarcate the Assyrians from Muslims having parallel geographical origins and also worked to link the Assyrians to the wider circle of Syriac-heritage peoples, in particular the Chaldeans. But as the Church of the East remained the particular institutional manifestation of Assyrian Christianity, that denomination persisted as the locus of Assyrian religious identification. This is further demonstrated by the fact that the Assyrian Church has sought closer official ties with the Chaldeans, while placing less

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166 For example, Al-Rasheed records the comments of an Assyrian Marxist on the significance of the Church of the East in defining what it means to be an Assyrian: “I am a Marxist, but sometimes I feel like going to our church for mass on Sunday. I enjoy listening to our deacon praying in our ancient language. (...) Our church has always been close to our national aspirations. We had national heroes and martyrs from the church. To me, being an Assyrian is also being a Christian, although I am a non-practising one. We are the first Christian community” (p. 117).
emphasis on relations with the other Syriac-heritage denominations, as the Chaldeans are categorized as being of the same “family” as the Assyrians (i.e. as having roots in the Church of the East).

Secondly, the ambiguity surrounding the role of the Church of the East in modern secularized Assyrian identity produced dividing lines within the community that were often, but certainly not always, drawn between those who were “religious” (or “sectarian”, as called by some) and those who were “political” in their outlooks. As such, these distinctions illustrated the tension that existed between the church and the nationalistic movement, due to their divergent (though not incompatible, as demonstrated by the theological underpinnings of national identity proposed by some) views of the purpose of the church in relation to the Assyrian community. The church, therefore, was essential to the nationalistic conception of Assyrian identity and central in its articulations, and yet a great obstacle to its acceptance and to the expansion of a nationalistic vision among the Assyrians. Thirdly, due to the different socio-political environments in which the Assyrians lived, these divisions of “sectarian” and “nationalistic” represented, to a certain degree, the distinction between the diaspora community and that of the homelands. For, although a majority of diaspora Assyrians remained unpolticized in the articulation of their identity, nationalistic efforts were disproportionately represented in the diaspora, as they were largely based in the West. Furthermore, as a result of the greater accessibility of means of communications, the Assyrian community abroad was able to maintain links among its members in Western countries more easily than with those Assyrians that remained in the “old countries”. The diaspora, therefore, began to develop “a life of its own”, one that was centred around its own activities and situation, and, as a result, became “self-referencing”, drawing its strength and sense of purpose from the scattered community rather than from the “core” in the homelands.

\[^{167}\] The rise of the Internet as a widespread medium of communication in the 1990s has greatly assisted in this regard, as is demonstrated by the great number of Assyrian sites, links pages, chat rooms, news and culture magazines, etc. presently found on the World Wide Web. As the Internet provides a form of instant, easily accessible communication, and one that allows the interaction of many individuals at any given moment, it has reduced the physical distance among members of the diaspora, who are thus much more able to operate as if they were within nearer proximity to each other.

\[^{168}\] Al-Rasheed, p. 194. This has occurred with other immigrant populations when they have been “cut off”, often due to political barriers, from the remnant of the community in the home country. For example, this has been the case with immigrant Palestinians, many of whom have spent much of their lives outside of the Middle East or who were born in the diaspora. The result is that it is the idea of the place by which they identify themselves and which is at the centre of their self-understanding, rather than the reality of it, which is, in actuality, quite foreign to them (For example, Said K. Aburish, *Children of Bethany: The Story of a Palestinian Family*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 145-147, 187-188, 196-197, 200, 233-235)
"myths" of the diaspora were based on the "home context", but, in reality, the community abroad had few points of actual contact with the community still in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{169} In this way, there developed, in a sense, two centres of Assyrian life and identity, that of the more sectarian-inclined homelands and that of the more nationally-prone diaspora, though there existed, of course, those of both persuasions in either environment.

Following the end of the Second World War, the Assyrians found themselves inhabiting countries that were developing strong majority-based and state-sponsored identities that did not encourage the incorporation of the Assyrians into mainstream society. The various regimes of Iraq and Pahlavi-era Iran sought either to eradicate or subsume other loyalties and identities and employed both positive incentives to encourage acquiescence and negative punishments for resistance. This trend became particularly strong in Iraq following the consolidation of Ba'th power after 1968. The heritage, physical location, and recent experiences of the Assyrians, however, had worked to entrench a distinct communal identity, and, as such, the community was often viewed as an impediment to national integration, though much more so in Iraq than in Iran. As for Iran, the secular, territory-based nationalism of the Pahlavis was promoted until the 1979 Islamic Revolution, whereupon the Assyrians, and many other non-Muslim communities, were returned to their former status of dhimmis, which alienated minorities from mainstream society by institutionalizing communal difference and distinction. Moreover, the nationalization of the oil industries of Iraq and Iran allowed the central governments to greatly expand their reach into the lives of their citizens, including the Assyrians. As a result of their situation (political and social), the majority of Assyrians, though maintaining their own identity, chose to try to integrate themselves into their societies in order to preserve their community and ease the pressures that might extinguish them; others, however, chose the path of opposition, even to the point of joining the armed Kurdish resistance. A third option exercised by a number of Assyrians was self-imposed exile: the power of their governments to force acquiescence, combined with the long-standing tensions between them and the majority communities and continued insecurity from political developments (such as the Iran-Iraq war), prompted many Assyrians to leave and seek residence in other countries, particularly in the West. But here as well, the Assyrian

\textsuperscript{169} Al-Rasheed, p. 194.
community was divided by its differences in political orientation. The primary root of the division was the rise of a widespread new conception of Assyrian identity, one based on language and ancestry, rather than on the Church of the East. Although this secularized identity did not prevent the church from holding a prominent position in Assyrian identity, nor did it attempt to, it did allow for a shift in the perceived needs and goals of the community. Extending from these new bases of Assyrian self-understanding, some Assyrians proposed a nationalistic vision for the community, with the aim of (re-)establishing an Assyrian political entity in Mesopotamia; for, as the community was a nation, it required fulfillment and security in its homelands under its own authority. Thus, the long-dormant seeds of nationalist thinking, begun even in the nineteenth century in Urmiya, developed into a movement that gained a growing number of adherents. Nevertheless, the nationalist conception of the Assyrian people and destiny was not accepted by the majority of Assyrians, though it certainly affected their self-articulation, and, in fact underscored the difference in orientation of those Assyrians that continued to hold more “sectarian” denominationally-based notions of the community, rather than more “national” and inclusive ones. The distinction was evident throughout the Assyrian community, but particularly distinguished the Assyrian diaspora from the Assyrian “old country” residents, as the diaspora was more affected by the secularization of the identity. Furthermore, as a result of greater accessibility to means of mass and long-distance communication, the diaspora reinforced its social and cultural independence from the homelands, thereby consolidating, in a sense, dual centres of Assyrian life.
Conclusion

The advent of Christianity among the Syrian population of the Roman and Parthian empires marked the beginning of the differentiation of the community into what would become the various Syriac-speaking denominations known in the present day. Among these was the Church of the East, so named because of its origins in Sasanian territory, but which soon spread through much of the contemporary known world. As religious adherence and ethnicity were interdependent notions at the time of the dawn of the Christian Church, those who joined the Church of the East took on Syrian “ethnicity” with their religious conversion. Additionally, the circumstances of the church changed over the centuries, concentrating and isolating the bulk of the community in the mountain vastness of Kurdistan, while its congregations in other lands, with the exception of the St. Thomas Christians in India, gradually faded into oblivion. In this way, although its message remained universal, the church came to be associated with a particular people group. Furthermore, as the Church of the East differentiated itself from other communities with which it shared language, culture, etc. (the West Syrian Orthodox and Catholics, as well as the East Syrian Chaldean Catholics), on the basis of its theological stance, it was religious adherence that was demonstrated to play the primary role in the conception of East Syrian identity. The centrality of the Church of the East in the definition of the Assyrian community was reinforced by the political structures of the day, which conferred civil and administrative duties upon the church leadership, particularly upon the Patriarch. By the nineteenth century, therefore, the Assyrians had developed a well-entrenched sense of communal identity, incorporating elements of language, culture, perceived ethnicity, and historical memory, but whose “gate-keeper” was the church.

The Assyrians’ strong sense of identity maintained the community as a population distinct from other surrounding peoples of the region, a distinction that was heightened by socio-political events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. European expansion, whether by military force or political influence, and the rise of nationalisms in Ottoman territories served to consolidate Muslim antagonism against the Europeans, as well as against those that benefited from or supported their efforts (i.e. primarily native Christians). Thus, the interaction of the Assyrians with the Europeans not only worked to
strengthen the sense of Assyrian communal particularity (through the political attentions and education given to them) and to provide certain elites among the Assyrians with an introduction to the theories of nationalism, but also served to widen the gap between the community and their neighbours. The resentments of the Muslim majorities were vented during the First World War, when the Assyrians sided with the Allied powers: the Assyrians were driven from their traditional homelands and into British-held territory, which subsequently became the new country of Iraq. The Assyrians, therefore, found themselves living as refugees at the end of the war, having lost their homes, a large portion of their population, and the majority of the ecclesiastical leadership. Despite their chaotic state, however, the Assyrians maintained their communal solidarity, due in large part to their concentration in the refugee camps set up by the British. Moreover, their refugee experience further promoted a sense of Assyrian consciousness, as the entire community—previously fragmented along mountaineer/plainsfolk lines—now shared a common memory of suffering and persecution that it encoded in new cultural forms (song, story, etc.) during the time in the camps. In addition, the camps brought together not only Assyrian tribes, but also those of other Syrian denominations (Chaldeans, Orthodox, Catholic), who became cognizant of their shared characteristics with others of Syrian heritage. Therefore, although the Assyrians eventually dispersed, many returning to their former homes, they did so with a larger number having received the seeds of a more “ethnic” self-understanding. Nevertheless, at this point in their history, the preoccupation of the Assyrian community with issues concerning basic survival, as well as their desire to return to life as it was before the war, was indicative of the continuing prevalence of their millet identity.

Following the conclusion of the treaties ending the war, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey—the countries inhabited by the Assyrians—each initiated strong programs of “nation-building”, with the dual aim of promoting the modernization of the state and of unifying their disparate populations under a cohesive national identity. The Assyrians, however, did not easily conform, in this regard, to the expectations placed upon them by their governments (typified by the Assyrians’ recruitment into the British levies in Iraq), and they largely remained separate from mainstream society, thereby intensifying the resentment of the central authorities and the fears of the Assyrians regarding their future under those authorities. During
this period, the Assyrian community’s political aspirations came to be focused on the family of the Patriarch. With secular leaders having failed to offer a viable alternative to Patriarchal headship, the young Eshai Shuint experienced the consolidation of his family’s position as the only recognized representative of the Assyrian people, both by his flock (though opposition to the Shimun family was never eradicated) and by the international community. As a result, the Patriarch took on the primary responsibility of voicing community concerns regarding the Assyrians’ socio-political situation and of demanding the implementation of their “national rights”, which largely entailed a return to a millet-type existence. This dual performance of the Patriarch, as the politically crusading religious head of the community, meant that the so-called “nation” became instantly identifiable with the Church of the East, thereby maintaining the traditional religious boundaries of communal identity. Therefore, despite the frequent use of the term “nation” in describing the community, the Assyrians remained as a self-understood political religious community, a millet in essence, if not in name.

After the end of the Second World War, however, two developments in particular aided in the reconfiguration of Assyrian identity. The first of these developments was the continuing trend of assimilationist policies in the countries traditionally home to the Assyrians, strongly institutionalized by this point, combined with sudden wealth from the recently-nationalized oil companies, thereby giving state interventions new reach and severity. Even with the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which returned the country to rule based on Islamic principles, the Assyrians eventually found themselves targeted for restrictions by the government, only now with the aim of ensuring distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims. The overall result was that the Assyrians remained alienated from larger society, despite any accommodations reached with the central authorities, as these accommodations required the Assyrians to limit their modes of self-expression. Secondly, the situation of the Assyrians in the “old countries” prompted many Assyrians to seek residence abroad, which offered the community again the threat of assimilation, but also access to socio-political freedoms and means of communication. In combination with the popularization of the theories and language of nationalism generally, these freedoms and tools aided in the dissemination of a new configuration of Assyrian identity, one based on notions of language
and ancestry as the primary characteristic of "Assyrian-ness". As a result, there emerged a new secularized understanding of the Assyrian community, though the Church of the East remained in a prominent position in relation to the community and its self-conception, both in terms of its authority among most Assyrians and of its role as cultural institution and supplier of "national" material (heroes, martyrs, and prophetic imagery). Moreover, the popularization of a secular Assyrian identity aided in the rise of nationalistic articulations on the part of some Assyrians, having the goal of national fulfillment in the establishment of an Assyrian entity in the community's traditional territory. However, with the concentration of nationalistic activities in the diaspora, and with the lack of communication (due to political restraints) between the diaspora and the communities in the "old countries", philosophical and ideological distance grew between the Assyrians in the "East" and those in the "West", with the result that the diaspora developed as a rival centre of Assyrian consciousness and life, despite its continuing dependence on "homeland myth" to ground itself.

The parameters of Assyrian identity, therefore, underwent evolutions and transformations from its configuration as a millet people --a religious community having linguistic and ethnic qualities, but defined primarily by its theological orientation (i.e. diphysite-specific)-- to an ethnic community with nationalistic leanings --a community based on commonalities of language, blood, and heritage (one element being Christianity). Through the entire process, however, the Church of the East remained a strong and central figure in the definition of the Assyrian people. At times, the church's involvement in the life of the Assyrians has been seen to benefit the rise of a "national"-type identity, while at other times it has been viewed as counterproductive to this development. As a result, the relationship between the Church of the East and the secular "guardians" of the Assyrian community displayed uneasy and ambiguous relations with the ecclesiastical leadership, both promoting the church as an embodiment of Assyrian culture and also condemning its lack of commitment to the Assyrian national cause.

The interplay between the Church of the East and the secular forces at work in Assyrian identity demonstrates the often turbulent, yet interlinked, connection of national identity to religious identity. In addition, however, the history of the development of a nationalistic Assyrian identity, regardless of its
lack of majority acceptance (at least, within the timeframe of this paper), also exemplifies the complex process at work in identity formation. For, the pressures influencing this formation were many, from international political interests, to regional movements and histories, to technological progression, to intellectual machinations. None of their own accord could have elicited a shift in the self-understanding of a body of people, but, operating in conjunction, they served to stimulate a search for other modes of self-understanding for the Assyrian community. Moreover, it must be realized that outside forces did not simply “produce” an Assyrian identity, but that the values and perceived needs of the community were also determinants of the course of the identity shift. In other words, the pre-existing Assyrian identity encountered new situations and pressures, which were interpreted and evaluated by the collective consciousness, and these worked in tandem to effect a re-direction of Assyrian orientation as regarded communal self-conception. The variety of forces, therefore, both in terms of content and origins, must be recognized in order to develop a realistic appreciation of the complexity and often-contradictory nature of such interactions and developments. The necessity of this approach applies not only to the study of minority groups or populations not in positions of power such as the Assyrians, but also to the study of those populations or communities that are often treated as “self-directing”, that is, majority or governing groups. A lack of appreciation of the variety of influencing factors in historical development has typically turned the study of Middle Eastern history, for example, into the study of Muslims, thereby making it synonymous with Islamic history. Regardless of the justifiable attentions paid to the Islamic element in Middle Eastern history, as Muslims have long been the numerical majority in the region, it does not justify the rendering invisible of non-Muslims. For, just as Muslims and Islam had have momentous impact on non-Muslim populations over the course of their interaction, so have non-Muslims consistently effected change and development in Muslim societies, regimes, and even Islamic civilization. Often Muslim response to non-Muslim stimuli has been aroused not by direct or intentional action by non-Muslims, but rather by their mere existence. In other words, Islam has never existed in a context void of non-Muslims and has had to constantly react and redefine in response to that reality. As such, the perspective on identity formation presented by the history of the Assyrians and the rise of a nationalistic
trend among them illustrates the multi-faceted dynamics at work in human interaction and offers a challenge to assumptions of uni-directional views of the flow of influence in majority / minority (or empowered / powerless) relations.
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