

Dairaboun (Deir Abun): The Strategic Assyrian Village

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Published in Zinda Magazine, February 1, 2006

Dairaboun, or more accurately Deir Abun, is an ancient Assyrian village. The name is strictly Aramaic and means the "Monastery of the Fathers."

The village of Dairaboun (Deir Abun) is situated in the Dohuk governorate in northwestern Iraq. It is strategically located at the border areas of the three countries of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. These shared borders are usually called the Iraq-Syria-Turkey triad borders. Dairaboun is about 3.3 miles away from the Syrian borders and about 2 miles from the Turkish borders. The village is separated from Syria by the natural boundary of the Tigris River and from Turkey by the Khabor River.* The village of Dairaboun is about 12.1 miles away from the center of qadha (district) Zakho. It is two miles east of the village of Faish Khabor, lying just below the Jebel (Mount) Bekhair, a narrow range of mountains, which rise to about 4,000 feet.

In 1950, the Iraqi General Antiquity Department issued declaration # 2 in which it considered the hill of Dairaboun and its Christian cemetery as national historical sites. The declaration was published in issue # 2907 of 'al-Waqa'i'a al-'Airaqiya (Iraqi Gazette) newspaper.

According to Iraqi National Museum documents (516 and 1334), the site the Dairaboun was mentioned during the Neo-Assyrian period (911 – 612 B.C.), in the Seleucid period (312 – 248 B.C.), and in the Islamic period. It could have been known between these two periods, i.e., during the Roman Empire, as well because there is a spring in the village known as 'Aina d' Romaye (Roman Spring). This is very likely since this region of modern northern Iraq was in early Christianity part of the Roman Empire. In A.D. 115, Roman Emperor Trajan made the Adiabene region (most of modern northern Iraq) a Roman province and called it Assyria.

The locals often find numerous archeological remains from antiquity in and around the village hill. Still, not enough efforts are made to excavate the site. During early Christianity, several manuscripts mention Dairaboun, including, for example, one manuscript dated 1671 (documented by Prof. S. P. Brock) by a believer named Maryam for the church of the village.

From the advent of Christianity, the region west of Zakho, including Dairaboun, was under the jurisdiction of the Church of the East diocese of 'Amadiya. The Dairaboun region falls generally in what is known as Gazarta (Jazira), one of the oldest dioceses of the Church of the East under the name of Bet Zabdai. Bet Zabdai was included in the province of Nisibin at the Synod of Isaac in 410 A.D. The region of Gazarta began to fall under the Catholic influence towards the end of the eighteenth century. There were churches that belonged to the Church of the East in the villages of Basurin and Diaraboun in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. In 1850, the Chaldean diocese of Gazarta included the towns of Gazarta, Zakho, and five villages in the Khabor Valley (west of Zakho). By 1913, most of that region became Catholics, and thus Chaldeans, under the Diocese of Zakho, which included Dohuk and villages such like Mansorriya, nine villages in the Khabor Valley and around Jabal (Mount) Judi to the west of Zakho. However, six Khabor Valley villages of Faish Khabor, Taqian, Nahrawan, Girik Bedro, Tel Qabin, and Wasta remained under the Church of the East. Of course, some became Protestants, due to the influence of American missionaries.

One of the most interesting documents about Dairaboun is available at the Chaldean Catholic Church archives in Baghdad. The Aaq Qoyonlu (White Sheep) Turkoman dynasty of Central Asia ruled for a short time many parts of modern Iraq until A.D. 1508. There is an official agreement dated A.D. 1491 between the White Sheep dynasty and Church of the East Patriarch Mar Shimun (1480 – 1502). The agreement grants the patriarch complete ownership of the Dairaboun spring and the farm around it and to do with that entire region what he wished. The boundaries of the granted land is described as from Khatoon dome shrine in the south, White Mountain and the Taqian property to the East, the Khabor River to the north, and Faish

Khabor (first mentioned in the seventh century in the Chronicles of Se'ert or Sa'art) and the Bajdah property to the west with all the water, mills, rocks, lands, trees, springs, rivers, and everything mentioned or not mentioned within these boundaries.

After the genocide of the Assyrians during and after World War I, the inhabitants of the village of Umra (in the Goyan district, northeast of Zakho), known as Dernaye, and then of Mansoriyya, and later the inhabitants of Barahanji (all these village are in the Botan Island, known earlier as Beth Zabday) resettled in the area between the hill and Bani Deri in Dairaboun. Three years later, the village broke up into three groups. The first and the biggest group lived in the village section where three quarters of it was owned by Sabri Yousif al-Jizrawi and Aziz Yaqo owned the other quarter. The second group, from Umra and Mansoriyya, lived in the Khanki village (north of Khabor) in the Syrian territories. The third group, mainly Barahanjs, lived in the village of Qroola in the northeast side of Dairaboun on the Turkish borders, which belonged to Aziz Yaqo as well.

As the 1933 massacre of Assyrians was looming in Iraq, two battalions of Iraqi army infantry, two squadrons of cavalry, one section of mountains artillery were brought to Dairaboun. It became the headquarter camp of the army that was awaiting the return of malik Yaqo, malik Louko and the hundreds of Assyrians on August 4, 1933, who crossed to Syria earlier. When the Assyrians crossed the Tigris River to surrender, the Iraqi Army fired upon them. The Assyrians retaliated by attacking the army camp at Dairaboun, claiming casualties at both sides. As the Assyrians withdrew back to Syria being unable to return to their homes in northern Iraq and as fighting ceased, the Iraqi army initiated the horrifying massacre of the Assyrian civilians. Kurdish and certain Arab tribes took part in the looting of many Assyrian villages. Dairaboun was one of the villages that were on the Iraqi army list to be bombed and destroyed because of the presumed assistance it presented to the Assyrian movement during the events. However, Patriarch Yousuf Emmanuel II (1900 – 1947) interfered and saved the village from destruction.

In 1936, Dairaboun had to be rebuilt next to the Church of Christ's Heart after a mysterious fire consumed most of the homes in the old village. In early 1940s, and due to its strategic location, Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gailani ordered to modernize the village through a serious reconstruction project. He deployed engineers and construction crews to build the village in its present location. During the 1940s, more Assyrian refugees returned to the village. This time it was mainly those who have escaped to Russia during WWI. Some of these refugees were volunteers in the Russian Army, such as Gharib Malko, Sliwa Morad, Essa Yousif, and others. During the British Mandate in Iraq, many enlisted in the Assyrian Levi force. These included: Shukri Garabet, Nimr Darweesh (a Yezidi), Sabri Polous, Mansour Mansour, Waro Oraham, Yaqo Ablahad, Shlimon Gharib, Nissan Rizzo, Barkho Yaqo, Toma Mousa, Shabo Khoshaba, Elia Giwargis, Giwargis Essa, Hanna Essa, Toma Isaac, Barkho Nissan, Yousif Sawmi, and others.

During the Kurdish armed rebellion and the battles in northern Iraq that started in 1961, the Assyrians were forced in many occasions to flee their homes and take refuge in other villages or in caves in nearby mountains despite the fact that they were not involved in the conflict. On one occasion in early 1960s, Kurds raided Dairaboun at night and looted all its weapons. In 1963, the Syrian army entered the village under the pretext of chasing Kurdish militia, pulled all male teenagers and men, led them outside the village, and tortured them severely. Then the Syrian army poured gasoline around them as they laid beaten and unable to walk intending to burn them alive. Fortunately, certain Iraqi military personnel in the region arrived and convinced the Syrians that these villagers were peaceful citizens and had no part in the Kurdish attacks in Syria, which destabilized the region. Finally, in 1974, the Iraqi government ordered all the inhabitants of Dairaboun to evacuate the village similarly to what it did with all villages on the Syrian-Iraqi border strip. The region was transformed to a military base. The Assyrians of the Dairaboun moved to Zakho, Baghdad, and many of them from there to the West.

The population of Dairaboun continued to dwindle after the 1933 Assyrian massacre. According to the 1947 Census, Dairaboun had a population of 536 people, 231 males and 305 females. Due to immigration, the 1957 census the population dropped to 400. After the 1958 revolution, others moved to Baghdad. In 1974, Dairaboun had 120 families (around 700 people).

The Assyrian Christians of the village of Dairaboun before evacuating it by the Iraqi government in 1974 were:

1. Afram Yousif Khosho
2. Isaac Barkho
3. Eilo Hani
4. Andrawos Morad
5. Ibrahim Aazar
6. Elia Giwargis
7. Issac Mousa
8. Iskandar Yousif
9. Ayoub Shukri
10. Polous Khano
11. Bolo Shlimon
12. Polous Jibbo
13. Pauly Barkho
14. Benyamin Khano
15. Potros Murad
16. Potros Nisan
17. Potros Danho
18. Potros Oshana
19. Bakos Dawood
20. Potros Essa
21. Barkho Yaqo
22. Bahho Shabo
23. Barkho Nisan
24. Potros Aazar
25. Danho
26. Dawood Oshana
27. Dawood Khano
28. Dawood Yaqo
29. Hitler Yousif
30. William Sliwa
31. Hanna Yousif
32. Hanna Potros
33. Hanna Khodeda
34. Hanna Murad
35. Hanna Jibbo
36. Hanna Potros
37. Hanna Essa
38. Hanna Sliwa
39. Yousif Sawmi
40. Yousif Khano
41. Yousif Yaqo
42. Yousif Raffi
43. Yaldo Talia
44. Yaqo Essa
45. Yaqo Sanna
46. Younan Giwargis
47. Yousif Mano
48. Yaqo Ablahad
49. Yousif Isaac
50. Yousif Saliba
51. Giwargis (Koki)
52. Giwargis Essa
53. Giwargis Sara

54. Giwargis Bambarak
55. Giwargis Yaqo
56. Kanon Elia
57. Kola Yousif
58. Lewis Murad
59. Murad Bolo
60. Moshe Younan
61. Mousa Khano
62. Marqos Barkho
63. Mansour Mansour
64. Mousa Younan
65. Mano Shabo
66. Murad Mansour
67. Minas Dawood
68. Maho Sawni
69. Matto Younan
70. Marqos Mammo
71. Nisan Razqo
72. Na'amo Kano
73. Nimo Khodeda
74. Nisan Razzo
75. Nisan Msor
76. Sawa Shabo
77. Sulaiman Sawmi
78. Seso Jambali
79. Azar Toma
80. Awni Mousa
81. Azar (Abu Giwargis)
82. Essa Khano
83. Essa Shabo
84. Essa Fatho
85. Essa Ayoub
86. Gharibo Potros
87. Sliwa Murad
88. Sliwa Isaac
89. Sliwa Zora
90. Raffi Shlimon
91. Rizqo Homi
92. Razzo Khoshaba
93. Shlimon Gharibo
94. Shoma Shabo
95. Shabo Khodeda
96. Shlimon Jibbo
97. Toma Isaac
98. Toma Mousa
99. Toma Moshe
100. Saeed Isaac
101. Youkhana Barbara
102. Mikha Giwargis
103. Khosho Rasho

The Yezidis of the Village were:

1. Nimr Darweesh
2. Darweesh Bori
3. Qasim Darweesh

4. Nisko Kolo
5. Hasan Masto
6. Qasim Masto
7. Shaikh Samar Qado
8. Chammi
9. Hadi (Father of Sabri, Khodeda, and Kammo)
10. Nasri Darweesh
11. Seso (Juri's brother)
12. Masto Khalid
13. Ezdo Khalid
14. Kashto Yousif
15. Hasan Hasso
16. Nasir
17. Qarro

Some of these Yezidis did own agricultural lands while others did not and were simply farm workers. In the 1970s, many Yezidi families came from Sinjar to work in the fields especially the Tomato fields.

Today, and according to latest eyewitnesses who visited northern Iraq, the village is predominately Kurdish, who have continued to move in and take over Assyrian villages just as they have done with other Assyrian lands in northern Iraq.

* End Note: This Khabor River is not the Khabor River in Syria that runs parallel to the Iraqi-Syrian borders and pours in the Euphrates where Assyrian villages were built after the Simele massacre of 1933 in Iraq.

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