

The Relentless Kurdish Campaign to Undermine Assyrian Rights

By Fred Aprim

May 22, 2006 (posted initially on AINA.ORG)

In an [article](#) titled *Is there an Assyrian cause in Iraqi Kurdistan?*, published in KurdishMedia.com, Mr. Xarib follows a meticulous process many other Kurdish writers have followed. First, they deny that Kurds committed atrocities against the Assyrians, despite overwhelming evidence of such atrocities. Second, they question and distort the Assyrian history. Third, they insinuate that northern Iraq (Assyria) is the illusive southern Kurdistan, which they claim to be part of the greater Kurdistan.

Here are few facts that are unequivocal:

- Since the eighteenth century, the Assyrians have [suffered the most](#) at the hands of the Kurds.
- The origin of the Kurds is ambiguous.
- The Kurds are not the indigenous people of northern Iraq (Assyria).
- There never existed a real country, state, or kingdom called Kurdistan.

The Article

Mr. Xarib begins his article stating that those Assyrians who write about Kurdish abuse of Assyrians in northern Iraq are "small fanatic group that desperately fabricates all kinds of propaganda against Kurds and the recent inaugurated Kurdish government."

The Kurdish abuse of Assyrians and other ethnic and religious groups in northern Iraq is [well documented](#). Interestingly, Mr. Xarib admits to such atrocities (AINA [5-18-2006](#)) later in his article, but he adds that they are not committed against Assyrians because they are Assyrians ethnically. The killing of young men, priests, the assassination of politicians, the abduction and rape of Assyrian girls, and acts of intimidation and harassment since 1992 are not fabricated. These are well-planned actions designed to terrorize the indigenous Assyrians and force them to leave their homes. Please read (Aprim 2003) and visit [www.zindamagazine.com](#).

Here are few selected examples of most recent acts of oppression by Kurdish political groups against Assyrians:

- On December 2003, ChaldoAssyrian Student Union boycotted the regional student elections due to unfair and oppressive acts by Kurdish groups.
- On February 17, 2004 at the Ankawa Boys High School, a group of Kurdish students from the Kurdistan Students Union entered classes against all rules and regulations and while classes were in session, they distributed applications to student to join the Kurdistan Student Union. The ChaldoAssyrian Students and Youth Union protested such inappropriate, illegal, and unfair activities that interfere with the students' studies.
- On July 2004, news reported that Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) officials under Masuad Barzani prevented Assyrians from moving back to their original homes in Dohuk, northern Iraq. Meanwhile, the Kurdish officials have allowed many Kurdish families from Qamishli, Syria, to

move into Dohuk. These foreign Kurdish families have crossed the Iraqi borders and the KDP has secured for them food, shelter and all means possible to assist them to settle.

- The KDP officials and forces are forcing Assyrians to raise Kurdish flags in many Assyrian villages and on top of Assyrian offices and even homes in some incidents.
- In the January 2005 Iraqi national elections, the KDP [blocked](#) the arrival of ballot boxes to many Assyrian towns and villages in Nineveh Plain. It is estimated that over 150,000 Assyrians were deprived from voting. Other groups such as Turkomen and Shabak faced the same fate.

In regards to Mr. Xarib's allegations that Assyrians are spreading propaganda against the new Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq, I need to explain that in the December 2005 elections, the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) was the only Assyrian (ChaldoAssyrian Suryani) Christian group that won a seat in the Iraqi parliament with its close to 50,000 total votes. The ADM won 85% of the Assyrian Christian votes. However, the KDP did not include the ADM in its new unified northern Iraq Kurdish regional government (KRG). Instead, the KDP picked three of its KDP Christian members or supporters (Aghajan, Mansour, and Baito) to occupy ministerial positions in that government.

The above examples are not fabrications; they are facts.

History Lesson

Mr. Xarib's ignorance of history is clearly obvious when he makes the following two false statements:

1. Quote: "There has been a nation living in Syria and Anatolia since thousands of years called The Arameans. These Arameans have many world heritages on their name, despite their anonymity in the west." Unquote. He goes on and tries to question the Assyrians history and any link between the modern and ancient Assyrians.
2. Mr. Xarib next plans to disassociate the modern Assyrians from the ancient ones. He tries to use language, which is an important unique component of any culture, to prove his claim. He states, "But we know their language [Assyrians'] is Aramean (Suriyani) which is totally different than ancient Assyrian language." Furthermore, he uses a quote by Grant, a missionary, in order to undermine the presence of Assyrians. I want to ask, what authority does Grant have to make an assertion about history? Is this medical doctor who never met Assyrians before his arrival to Anatolia (eastern Turkey), an authority in history? If he is not, what scholarly value is there for what he claims?

Identity and Homeland

The presence of Assyrians in northern Mesopotamia (northern Iraq, southeastern Turkey, and northeastern Syria) has been uninterrupted for at least [four millennia](#). There is no comparison between the short history of the Aramean tribes and their small city-states in Syria on one side and the Old, Middle, and Neo Assyrian Empires and later the great Assyrian Christian missionary enterprise throughout Asia on the other side. Comparing between the two is a historical sin and scholarly history books are best proof to this fact. Of course, there is always the exception in everything in life and it is always interesting to find how those politically oriented writers pick and chose what they present as references to quote.

Northern Iraq was never a "Kurdish region," although Kurds lived in it indeed. The Kurdish region originally was the mountainous region extending across the Iranian Zagros Mountains from the city of Kermenshah passing by parts of the mountains of southeastern Turkey and reaching southern Armenia. Furthermore, fact is that there never existed any state, country, empire, kingdom, or any other official region under the name of Kurdistan. Indeed, the name Kurdistan (the land of the Kurds) was used by foreign travelers when visiting those mountainous regions and interacting with the population. These travelers needed to distinguish between the various regions they visited. They were visiting those regions during a time when all the Middle East, including Mesopotamia, northern Africa, and parts of Europe were part of the Ottoman Empire; these various regions were not the independent states we have today. Many of these travelers have forgotten about Assyria or they were under the impression that the ancient civilizations were completely lost. And since they spoke with many Kurds in these mountains, they referred to the region as Kurdistan (the land of the Kurds).

Northern Iraq, including Mosul, Dohuk, Arbil, and Karkuk, was never known as Kurdistan. Historically, this region is well known to be Assyria and even in much later historical references it kept its Syriac name "Athour", i.e. Assyria. During most of the second half of the second millennia in which northern Iraq was under the Ottoman rule (for some 450 years and until the conclusion of WWI), the region was called "Mosul Vilayet" (Mosul Province). Only in 1921, the three Ottoman Vilayets of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra were combined and parted from the Ottoman Empire and made part of what became known as Iraq. It is funny that Kurdish writers claim that northern Iraq (Mosul Vilayet) was stripped from Kurdistan and rewarded to Iraq. How could one strip a part of something that did not exist? Was there initially a country named Kurdistan were parts of it were taken away? The answer is a definite no. Furthermore, what makes a land a Kurdish land? Why not Assyrian land since the history of the Assyrian Empire is well known in northern Iraq and Assyrians (ChaldoAssyrian Suryanis) have continued living on that land for at least four millennia? Since the turn of the twentieth century the Kurds have in great numbers entered northern Iraq from Iran and Turkey and settled there. This migration intensified after WWII when the Persian Army put down the Kurdish rebellion in northwestern Iran and crushed the Mahabad Republic of western Iran that the Kurds had established in 1946, which lasted for less than one year.

Lets consider the following few references:

1. The region of northern Iraq was known as Assyria even in later historical Parthian references, centuries after the fall of Assyrian political system. It kept its Syriac name "Athur", i.e. Assyria (Parpola 2000). During early Christianity, the region of northern Iraq was named Adiabene. Gibbon, the eighteenth century British historian and one time Parliamentarian, writes: "Ammianus remarks, that the primitive Assyria, which comprehended Ninus (Nineveh) and Arbela, had assumed the more recent and peculiar appellation of Adiabene, ." (Gibbon 2001).
2. O'Leary writes: "Trajan decided to carry Roman authority farther east and to bring the disordered borders lands into a more satisfactory condition, and to effect this in AD 115 conquered Mesopotamia and made it a Roman province. The following year he invaded Parthia,

advanced to the Tigris, occupied Adiabene in northern Mesopotamia and made it a province under the name of Assyria,." (O'Leary, n.d.)

3. What does Segal tell us? Abgar the black of the first century AD wrote a letter to Narsai King of Assyria. Historical evidence indicates that Narsai King of Adiabene also known as King of Assyria was a contemporary of the Abgar the Great (177-204 AD). (Segal, 2001)
4. Prof. Harrak states: "The ecclesiastical term for northern Mesopotamia, Athur (Assyria), corresponds to al-Jazira, or the land of Mosul of the Arab geographers; see Fiey, Assyrie III, 12, 36." (Harrak, 1999)
5. In classical Syriac literature, Athor (Athur) is not only the name of the biblical Ashur, but also of the city and church province of Mosul. From here came the Arabic name. The Arab geographer Yaqut (d. 1228) mentions that Athur had been the name of Mosul before it was called Mosul [read Yaqut al-Hamawi: Mu'jam al-buldan. Vol. I. (n.d. 92b). Beirut] (Heinrichs, 1993).
6. Additionally, it seems that during the mid-thirteenth century Nineveh was a known district of Mosul. Patton writes that before the Mongols entered Mosul in 1262 they sent a decree with Shams al-Din al-Ba'shiqi, a former Christian governor of the Nineveh district, promising the population a fair treatment (Patton 1991). Patton later gives details of the events and explains how al-Ba'shiqi was named governor of Mosul and how the city under the Mongol rule had other Christian governors (Patton 1991).

Northern Iraq was called Athor or Athur (Assyria) until the fall of the Baghdad Caliphate in 1258 and the coming of the Mongols.

Furthermore, northern Iraq remained predominantly Christian until the destructions of Tamerlane in 1401 and the Assyrians remained to make a sizeable population until the turn of the twentieth century. Consider the following:

1. The people of Adiabene (Arbil, Kirkuk, and Mosul) were called the Adiabeni, and by the term Adiabeni, for the first century A.D. well-known Jewish historian Josephus, it was meant Assyrian (Whiston 1999).
2. Hitti writes that the population of northern Iraq in the early tenth century was still, in the opinion of ibn-al-Faqih [Buldan, p. 315, I. 9] "Muslim in name but Christian in character" (Hitti, 1970).
3. The Syriac Church had in the eleventh century more members than the Latin and Greek churches combined (Offermann 1950).
4. Tamerlane massacred 90,000 Christians in Baghdad alone. The survivors moved to settle among their own in northern Iraq (Vine 1937, p. 161). Nestorian Church (Church of the East) remained strong in northern Iraq between the Tigris and Lakes Van (Turkey) and Urmia (Iran) (Vine 1937).
5. Dr. Saadi al-Malih, "The Chaldeans: from Paganism to Islam", (Montreal: 1997) refers to Jean M. Fiey, "Christians during the Abbasid Caliphs," (Beirut: 1990), page 139, who states that Tikrit (city north of Baghdad) was emptied from its Christians in the twelfth century. He adds

that Christianity was all over villages in northern Iraq in Mosul, Arbil, and Kirkuk in the fourteenth century.

6. Sarah Shields writes that between 1726 and 1834, seventeen Nestorian (a denomination of the Assyrian people) occupied the office of Mosul governor (Shields 2000).

Every single rock that is turned over in northern Iraq links the region to Assyria. There is not a single artifact, stele, monument, or record that links the region to Kurds. There is not a single artifact in any world museum about Kurdish heritage or civilization. Furthermore, since the Assyrians adopted Christianity, their presence in northern Iraq has been uninterrupted for 2000 years. The ancient monasteries and churches in northern Iraq that are still standing despite all destruction during the various occupations, is solid evidence that Assyrians lived on this land and never disassociated from it.

Language

Mr. Xarib is not a linguist to make claims about the Assyrian Akkadian, Aramaic, and Syriac languages; in fact his claim is so poorly argued that did not worth my time. However, in order to refute such claim and educate the public, this rebuttal was necessary.

The ancient Assyrians used Akkadian language and the Cuneiform script in writing. The Cuneiform script was complicated and only selected scribes were able to use it. When the Assyrian Empire expanded to the Mediterranean Sea to the west and Persia to the east, they needed to find a better way to communicate with the new population in these new conquered lands. When they were introduced to the Aramaic script, they adopted it around the mid eighth century B.C. That made good sense because of a couple reasons. First, the Aramaic alphabet was simpler for the general population to use than the complicated Cuneiform. The other reason seems logical since it facilitated administrative tasks of the Assyrian Empire in distant parts where Aramaic language and script was far better known than the Assyrian Akkadian language. However, the adoption of Aramaic did not cause the disappearance of the Assyrian Akkadian. For a matter of fact the Assyrian Akkadian survived even the fall of the Assyrian empire. Jean Bottero affirmed that there exists Akkadian script that dates back to the year 74 of the Christian era (Bottero, 1995). Furthermore, M. J. Geller, a professor at the University College London, writes: "I have argued elsewhere that Akkadian was likely to have survived throughout the Parthian period, at least until the mid-third century A.D." (Geller, 2000).

The Assyrians did not drop completely their Cuneiform script or forgot their Akkadian language. It is proven that the Aramaic language (Imperial Aramaic) that the Assyrians began to use in around the mid eight century B.C., and continue to use today under the term Syriac, has [loan-words](#) from, or was influenced by, the Assyrian Akkadian (Kaufman 1974). Therefore, contrary to certain claims, the Assyrians did not stop using the Assyrian Akkadian language in the eighth century B.C. when they adopted the Aramaic language; they rather used the two side by side. If the Akkadian language survived till the mid-third century A.D., as the reference above shows, one could ask who preserved it, if not mainly the Assyrians and Babylonians of Mesopotamia? The Classical "Syriac language" (al-Lugha al-Suryaniya) was developed from the Neo-Aramaic. The Neo-Aramaic had strong roots in Imperial Aramaic, which the ancient Assyrians adopted, which in turn has been influenced heavily by the Assyrian Akkadian. Some linguists assert that it was the West and the Greeks in particular who coined

the Aramaic language as Syriac as Christianity began to spread. In the East the original term Aramaic language (lishana Aramaya) continued to be used until modern days. One dialect of Neo-Aramaic is the Eastern Neo-Aramaic, and as Jastrow explains, is the dialect used throughout the geographical area of southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, and parts of Iran (Jastrow, 1990). The main language throughout the modern Middle East was Aramaic (Syriac) well into the ninth and tenth centuries. Arabic began to take over at the time since it was the language of the Koran, the holy book of the newly spreading religion of Islam, which began in the seventh century.

Languages evolve with time; they are not static. A static language is a dead language. One cannot expect that the language of the Assyrians used 4000 years ago would be the same exact language they use today. That is absurd. History tells us that it was around the eighth century B.C. that the Greek alphabet was modified to construct the Latin alphabet. The Classical Latin was born around sixth century B.C. and it disappeared around the fifth century A.D. as it transformed to what could be called Popular Latin. This Popular Latin spread all over Europe and was spoken in Asia and northern Africa. Popular Latin assimilated many other languages, but it significantly adopted from and was affected by those languages. The question that rises here and has much to do with the counterpart example of the Assyrian experience is, did the Spaniards or the Germans disappear because they began to use the Latin alphabet? (Aprim 2004)

Couple of questions here are in order for Mr. Xarib: What do linguists and other experts consider the Kurdish language? Isn't it a dialect of Persian? Therefore, could we state that the Kurds are Persians? Does the Kurdish language have its own alphabet? The answer is no, since they use Arabic alphabet in Iraq and Latin in Turkey. If so, what cultural foundation does the Kurds have if they do not have a language or alphabet of their own?

Population

It has been the atrocities of mainly the Kurds that have reduced the population of the Assyrians to their small numbers today. Lets read about the Assyrian Christians population:

1. The population of Mosul, according to the census of 1849, was as follows: Mohammedans (Moslems, including Arabs, Kurds, Yezidis, Turkomen) 2,050 families; Christians 1,100 families; Jews 200 families (Badger, 1852).
2. The 1911 Edition Encyclopedia: MOSUL, a town of Mesopotamia, capital of a Turkish vilayet and sanjak of the same name, on the right bank of the Tigris, in 36o 35' N., 43o 3' E. Pop. 40,000 (Moslems 31,500; Christians 7000; Jews 1500).
3. For a more recent population, Ma'oz writes in the Appendix section a chart labeled # 2 and titled: "Division by Countries," shows the religious communities of Iraq as 60-65% Shi'i Muslim; 32-37% Sunni Muslim; and 5% Christian. And under Ethnic Groups the author shows 75-80% Arab; 15-20% Kurdish; and 5% Assyrian, other (Ma'oz, 1999).

How did the Assyrian Christians population reduced from being half of the Moslems in 1852 to about one-fourth in 1911 and finally only 5% of the population in 1990s? It is only the continuous persecution and oppression of Assyrians by Kurds and Middle Eastern governments.

Final Thoughts

The Kurds understand very well that northern Iraq is an Assyrian land. They have been working methodically to Kurdify this land. The Kurds have no chance to create a state of their own within Turkey or Iran. Their emphasis has shifted towards creating that state in Iraq and perhaps Syria. The Kurds understand that the Assyrians have legitimate claims to these lands. Next year, the Kurds plan to have a referendum to decide the future of Kurds in northern Iraq. The Kurds want to usurp the last Assyrian strong hold around Mosul (Nineveh Plain) into the future Kurdistan. They have done many things to achieve these goals, including:

1. How did the Kurds increase so rapidly in the region of Dohuk for example, a region that was suppose to be assigned to Assyrians per the recommendations of the Special Commission of the League of Nations when the Iraqi-Turkish frontiers were being discussed in the 1920s? They controlled one village at a time. Throughout the 1900s, but mainly in the last few decades, small numbered armed Kurdish families have quietly yet methodically settled around the outskirts of Assyrian villages. Then they began to harass and terrorize the peaceful Assyrians of those villages and force them to vacate their lands and they moved in (Aprim 2003).
2. The Kurds change the name of many Assyrian villages and towns. For example, they have changed the name of ancient historic Assyrian city of Arbil to Hawler, Aina d' Noneh to Kani Masa, Sleewana to Slaifani, ancient Nohadra to Dohuk, and many others.
3. Most recently, the KDP and Barzani have employed and used few Assyrian members in the KDP to give the world the impression that Assyrians are being treated well. However, these few individual Assyrians were not elected by the Assyrians in any of the regional elections of the 1992 in northern Iraq and the January and December 2005 Iraqi National Elections.
4. The KDP and Barzani strengthened their cooperation with certain Christian religious figures and churches and build some churches. This is an effort to empower the various religious figures and keep the various Assyrian church denominations divided from one side and to undermine the Assyrian political institutions in Iraq from the other. This interference in Assyrians' internal affairs is undemocratic and completely rejected.
5. The KDP and Barzani emphasize on the well being of Christians in northern Iraq, who are ethnically Assyrians (including Chaldeans, Nestorians, Jacobites, and other denominations). Of course, in Kurdish ideology these Christians are Christian Kurds and not ethnically Assyrians. That is why the KDP does not mind promoting Christianity. Furthermore, they would like to show the world that they are tolerant to Christianity, thus satisfying the "Christian" West.

To question, undermine, and marginalize the rights of the Assyrians (ChaldoAssyrian Suryanis) on their ancestral lands in northern Iraq is unethical, illegal, and most importantly against all International and Human Rights Laws. The Kurds have the right to live free and in peace and tranquility just like any other free people around the world, and so do the Assyrians. The empowered Kurds must not win their rights at the expense of the powerless Assyrians, the indigenous people of northern Mesopotamia (northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey and northeastern Syria). The world must not stand idle while Assyria is being transformed to Kurdistan. I prefer a free, democratic, Pluralistic, secular, and united

Iraq; however, if Iraq is to be divided and Kurdistan founded, then historic Assyria must see justice and find her place among the world's nations.

Click on the [Hyperlink for Kurdish violence](#) against Assyrians

Bibliography

Al-Malih, Saadi. *The Chaldeans: from Paganism to Islam*. (Montreal: 1997).

Aprim, Fred. *Assyrians: The Continuous Saga*. Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2004.

Aprim, Fred. "Indigenous People in Distress". Assyrian Academic Society, 2003.

Aprim, Fred. [Assyria or Kurdistan?](#) September 15, 2003.

Badger, George Percy. *The Nestorians and their Rituals*. Vol. I. London: Darf Publishers Limited, 1987, first published in 1852.

Badger, George Percy. *The Christians of Assyria commonly called Nestorians*. London: W. H. Bartlett, 1869.

Bottero, Jean. *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*. Z. Bahrani and M. De Mieroop, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Geller, M.J. Paper titled "The Survival of Babylonian Wissenschaft in Later Tradition." Published in *The Heirs of Assyria*. The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project. Sanna Aro and R.M. Whiting, ed. Helsinki, 2000.

Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Edited and abridged by David Womersley, Penguin Books, 2000.

Harrak, Amir. *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999.

Heinrichs, Wolfhart. *The Modern Assyrians: Name and Nation*. Semitica: Serta philologica: Constantino Tsereteli dicata. Edited by Riccardo Contini, Fabrizio Pennacchietti, Mauro Tosco. Silvio Zamorani Editore, Torino, 1993.

Hidirsah, Yakup. *Massacre of Christians (Syriacs, Nestorians, Chaldeans, Armenians) in Mesopotamia and Kurds. A Documentary Study*: Hannover, 1997. Hitti, Philip. *History of the Arabs*. 10th ed., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970.

Jastrow, Otto. Paper titled "Personal and Demonstrative Pronouns in Central Neo-Aramaic." Published in *Studies in Neo-Aramaic*. Wolfhart Heinrichs, ed. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.

Kaufman, Stephen A. *The Akkadian Influence on Aramaic*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974.

Ma'oz, Moshe. *Middle Eastern Minorities: Between Integration and Conflict*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999.

Offermann, Klemis A. *Aramaic Origin of the New Testament*. Illinois: Enterprise Publishing Co., 1950.

O'Leary, De Lacy. *How the Greek Science Passed to the Arabs*. Chicago: Ares Publishers, Inc., n.d.

Parpola, Simo. "Assyrians after Assyria". In *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*, 2000.

Patton, Douglas. *Badr al-Din Lu'lu': Atabeg of Mosul, 1211-1259*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991.

Segal, J.B. *Edessa the Blessed City*. 2nd ed. New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2001.

Shields, Sarah. *Mosul Before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-Sided Cells*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2000.

Vine, Aubrey. *The Nestorian Churches*. London: Independent Press Ltd, 1937.

Whiston, William. Trans., *The Works of Josephus*. Hendrickson Publishers, 14th printing, 1999.