

Introduction

We are happy to bring to our readers, JAAS Vol. XIV, No. 1. The contributors in the English section are well known by the readers, and need not be reintroduced at length.

The lead article in this issue is “Qateeni Gabbara: William Daniel’s Legacy.” Mr. William Warda and Dr. Edward Odisho who have co-authored this article are among previous JAAS contributors. Dr. Odisho is founder and first editor-in-chief of this journal, Mr. Warda wrote a scholarly two part article titled “The Heritage of the Contemporary Assyrians: Setting the Record Straight,” in JAAS, vol. VIII no. 1& 2, 1994.

The contributions of the late William Daniel to Assyrian music and poetry are well known to Assyrian communities around the world. The Epic of Qateeni Gabbara, known by the majority of Assyrians, was especially popular among the Assyrian “Ashirets,” of Hakkari Mountains. Daniel’s composition of this old tale, a monumental task, was his greatest contribution to modern Assyrian poetry. This article is a brief analysis of the poetic, linguistic, and symbolic significance of this literary masterpiece.

The Aramaic language, its history, structural properties, and dialectical variations, is a vast topic for scholarly investigation. This ancient language became the vernacular of masses in Neo-Assyrian Empire, and achieved the position of *lingua franca* during the era of Persian Empire. Despite its continuous decline after the Arab conquest, it has survived among the Christian communities and ethnic minorities in the Middle East to this day. Our colleague Dr. Efrem Yildiz, professor of Biblical Studies at the Universidad de Salamanca in Spain, addresses controversial issues regarding dialectical variations and their classification in this issue of JAAS. We hope that his article will stimulate other scholars in the field to further investigate the evolution of this historical language, and the history of its speakers.

Dr. Zomaya Solomon has been introduced in every issue of JAAS since 1993 as the author of informative articles in Assyrian grammar. The “Inflection of Weak Verbs in Assyrian Aramaic, Part I: The I Conjugation” is the thirteenth part of this series of articles discussing different aspects of the Assyrian Aramaic grammar.

Mr. George Yana’s three book reviews in the past issues have stimulated interest among many of our readers on the subject of modern Assyrian history. In his article, “Myth vs. Reality,” he challenges the claims made by some authors that the use of the name “Assyrian” for modern Assyrians was a creation of the

Anglican Missionaries in the nineteenth century. By bringing additional information and documentation, especially from the “*Chronicle of Carmelites in Persia*,” the earliest Western Christian missionaries in Iran, he proves that the use of the name “Assyrian” for Christian communities in Iran and Bet-Nahrain has a long history and was used centuries before the arrival of British and American missionaries in the Middle East. For additional information on this subject we refer our Assyrian language readers to the article by Mr. Odisho Malko in the Assyrian section of this issue (pages 17 – 45).

The book review section includes three recent publications. The first is “*Assyrian-Chaldean Christians in Eastern Turkey and Iran: Their Last Homeland Re-charted*,” by Dr. J.C.J. Sanders. The second, “*Iraqi Assyrian Christians in London: The Construction of Ethnicity*,” by Madawi Al-Rasheed, is the subject of two separate reviews. This interesting approach provides the reader with somewhat different perspectives on the same book. The third is “*The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis*,” by Michael M. Gunter.

The reviewers are also familiar to the subscribers of JAAS. Mr. Francis Sarguis is the editor of the book review section of this journal. Ms. Gladys Warda, is an instructor in mathematics at the University of Uruguay, who has contributed to the book review section in prior issues of this journal. She is the daughter of an Assyrian father from the Tiari tribe and an American mother. Her father, who passed away last year, was the last survivor of five thousand Assyrian refugees who migrated to Uruguay after the persecution of Assyrians during World War I. Though she has not lived among Assyrians, she has faithfully maintained her interest in our cultural heritage and ethnic Assyrian background.

On a final note, we regretfully announce the loss of an Assyrian writer, poet and a great scholar, Yoab Benjamin. He was born to Shamasha David Bet-Benyamin and Khanimmi Bet-Kelaita, on January 25, 1931 in Mosul, Iraq and passed away on May 26, 2000 in Chicago. The editorial board has lost not only a brother, but also a friend and a valuable contributor to our journal. Our associate Francis Sarguis, in a separate note, has offered his thoughts on Yoab, shared by the rest of us.

We at JAAS wish to express our deepest sympathy to the Benjamin family and in particular to his spouse May, and his brother Daniel, the Assyrian editor and a strong pillar of this journal.