

We Are Assyrians

Odisho Malko Gewargis, Baghdad, Iraq

Translated from Assyrian by

Youel A Baaba §

Dr. John Joseph published two articles in the English section of the *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*, the first under the heading of “Assyria and Syria: Synonyms?”¹ and the second titled “The Bible and the Assyrians, It Kept Their Memory Alive.”² Both articles rotate around a pivot that is significant in the history of Assyrians, past and present.

“How could the present day Assyrians be the descendents of ancient Assyrians?” Many Assyrians and non-Assyrians have repeatedly revisited this question of connection between the modern Assyrians and ancient Assyrians. What is strange is that some Assyrians raise doubt about, or even deny, the

§ a. Odisho Malko Gewargis of Baghdad, Iraq wrote this article in Assyrian. It appeared in the *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*, Vol. XIV, no.1, 2000. *JAAS* requested Youel A Baaba, its Assyrian language editor, to translate it into English for two main reasons. *Firstly*, the article has a specific academic flavor primarily because it treats the theme of *connection* between the ancient and modern Assyrians with considerable dependence on eastern sources written in Assyrian (Aramaic) and Arabic. Such references prefer to use derivations from the Aramaic root <ʔθr> rather than the ancient Assyrian root <ʔʃr> [a few International Phonetic Alphabet symbols are used: ʔ = Ayin/ܐ : ܐ, ʔ = aleph/ܐܘܠܐ : ܐܘܠܐ, θ = theta/ܐܘܫܐ : ܐܘܫܐ, ʃ = ‘sh’/ܫܘܒܐ : ܫܘܒܐ]. Therefore, derivations such as <ʔaθθur> and <ʔaʃʃur> are used predominantly and continuously throughout the history at least since the emergence of the Achaemenid Empire, circa mid 6th century B.C. *Secondly*, *JAAS* wanted its readers who are not literate in Assyrian to benefit from their exposure to a different point-of-view on the issue of the *connection*. However, *JAAS* would like to inform its readers that the theme of *connection* seems to be well covered, especially by authors including Richard Frye, John Joseph, Edward Odisho and Simo Parpola, among others, hence *JAAS* is not interested in revisiting the theme for a while. *JASS*’ view is that recent research has produced ample evidence to make the connection strongly tenable and justifiable (editor).

b. The references listed in the footnotes are those of the author. The translator has not verified these references. It should also be noted that certain quotes appearing herein, were actually translated by the author from the respective languages of the original sources. Hence the reader should expect some marginal linguistic inconsistency in wording between the original language of the reference and its English rendition (translator).

¹ John Joseph, “Assyria and Syria: Synonyms?,” *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* XI, no. 2 (1997): 37-43.

² John Joseph, “The Bible and the Assyrians: It Kept Their Memory Alive,” *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* XII, no. 1 (1998): 70-76.

connection, which is very simple and transparent in my view. I am not sure whether the denial is for the promotion of the academic knowledge or simply for the arousal of suspicion in the historical authenticity of the national identity of the modern Assyrians.

In the articles referenced above, Joseph wants the readers to believe in his claim that western missionaries called the Nestorians of the Church of the East Assyrians only as far back as the latter part of the 19th century implying that they did not carry this appellation prior to that date. Such a claim is inconceivable and indefensible.

He bases his conclusion of denying the Assyrian historical identity on the biased scholarship and opinions of some western scholars who were either inaccurate in their rendition of some texts in the Assyrian (Aramaic) language or were unaware of the existence of such texts. The inaccuracy in rendition involved especially the pronunciation of names and titles found in ancient manuscripts written in Aramaic sources many of which consistently maintain the continuity of national identity of modern Assyrians. The focus of this rebuttal to Joseph's claim will focus on the following statements cited from his two articles:

1. As early as the 18th century, the British historian Gibbon was aware of these confusions. "The Nestorians, wrote Gibbon, "Under the name of Chaldeans or Assyrians, are confounded with the most learned or the most powerful nation of Eastern antiquity." (*JAAS* vol. XI, no 2, page 41)
2. The various names by which these Aramaic-speaking Christians were known, and the titles used by the Roman Catholic Church in reference to their patriarchs--sometimes with such exotic combinations as "Chaldeans of Assyria," or "Eastern Chaldeans of Catholic Assyria"--were "hardly ever used" by the patriarchs or the people themselves. (*JAAS* vol. XI, no.2, page 41)
3. Nestorians "are known also as Assyrians, a name commonly used in reference to them only since the First World War." (*JAAS* vol. XI, no.2, page 41)
4. Quoting Fiey: "and have had to align some 50 pages of proper names of people; there is not a single writer who has an 'Assyrian' name." (*JAAS* vol. XI, no.2, page 41)
5. "Modern Assyrian writers are eager to establish a link between themselves and the ancient Assyrians... They often refer to Tatian's statement that he was born in the land of the Assyrians"—usually mistranslated into "I am an Assyrian"; or they cite the Acts of Mar Qardagh which traces the martyr's ancestry to ancient Assyrian kings. (*JAAS* vol. XII, no. 1, page 73)
6. Scholars point out that he [Tatian] was not even born in lands to the east of the Euphrates. Tatian (Greek Tatianos), writes Fergus Millar, no more

came from geographical Assyria than did that other ‘Assyrian’ with a Latin name, Lucian (Greek Lucianos) of Samosata. Millar explains simply that the terms Assyria and Assyrians were common terms then for geographical Syria and its inhabitants. (*JAAS* vol. XII, no. 1, page 73)

7. By *Athoraye*, the renowned Patriarch [Michael the Syrian, Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church] undoubtedly meant the inhabitants in and around Mosul. (*JAAS* vol. XI, no.2, page 40)

These old and modern arguments and claims of historical evidence and opinion spread by a few students of history have been intentionally selected by this Assyrian scholar and compressed into two articles with alleged academic objectives.

In this condensed rebuttal article, we shall identify and quote sources from different historical periods that testify to the existence of Assyrians as a well-defined ethnic group in their own region, Assyria, from the fall of Nineveh till this day. To attain this objective, we will divide the article into four separate headings:

- **Historical Evidence**
- **Continuous existence of Assyrian civilization**
- **Objective Conclusions**
- **Supplemental Evidence**

Evidence found in the folds of history confirms the ethnic identity of the Assyrian people and clarifies the human chain that ties them together from ancient times to the present. Objectivity and logic make every researcher who is true to his conscience and to scientific research firmly confess that the present day Assyrians, as Nestorians, or Chaldeans or Syrians, are from the same Assyrian stem of old days.

- **Historical Evidence**

There are numerous sources that clearly show the truth of the continuous existence of the Assyrian people in the cities and villages of their country; especially in the northern areas in the mountains of Assyria, where they took refuge from the wrath and hardship of wars. History tell us that an Assyrian force under the leadership of the brother of Ashurbanipal left Assyria heading towards the territory of Harran and entered the mountains of Assyria and Urartu.³

³ S. de V. Loder, *The Truth About Mesopotamia, Palestine and Syria*, vol. 1 (1923), 37.

Even prophet Nahum the Elkoshite (Prophetic ministry probably between 663 and 612 B.C.) verifies this event as he talks about great Nineveh, “thy people is scattered upon the mountains . . .”⁴

With the passage of time, Assyrians returned to their own country and Herodotus the Greek in his *Histories* states:⁵

“Babylon and the rest of Assyria, the ninth province,⁶ contributed 1,000 talents of silver and 500 child eunuchs.

And Darius I, while building one of his palaces, wrote in his inscriptions:

“I dug deep into the earth . . . and filled it with pebbles and poured moulds of bricks. Babylonians did all this work and Assyrians brought down cedar trees from Lebanon to Babylon.”⁷

Because of the significance and wealth of the Ninth Province “Athura Satrapy” (Assyria), Darius used substantial military force against the Assyrians who rose up to liberate their country. And he mentioned the killing of one of the leaders of the uprising in the inscriptions of Behistun.⁸ Again, Darius I mentioned in his third illustration in Persopolis⁹ the attacks of Assyrians and Babylonians.

When Herodotus visited Assyria 150 years after the fall of its kingdom, he documented:

“The Assyrian contingent wore on their heads either bronze helmets or plaited helmets of a peculiarly foreign design which is hard to describe. Their shields, spears, and daggers, resembled Egyptian ones, and they also carried wooden clubs with iron studs, and wore

⁴ Nahum 3:18.

⁵ Herodotus, *The Histories*, transl. Robin Waterfield, Book Three (Oxford University Press, 1998), 209.

⁶ The Satrapy of *Athura* (Assyria) is mentioned as the fifth satrapy in the inscriptions of Behistun monuments. Scholars disagree on the numerical sequence of the *Athura* satrapy between the fifth and the ninth. See J.M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (New York: Schocken Press, 1983), 81 (editor).

⁷ A.T Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; Phoenix Books, 1966), 168.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 112, 115; James G. Macqueen, *Babylon* (New York: Fredrick A. Preager, 1964), 218-219.

⁹ Olmstead, 113.

linen breastplates. These are the people the Greeks call Syrians, but they were called Assyrians by the Persian invaders."¹⁰

With the illumination of the Christian dawn, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled regarding the existence of Assyrians and their embracement of Christianity:

*"In that day Israel will be the third along with Egypt and with Assyria."*¹¹

Thus, the Assyrian will be the first to believe in Gospel, then the Egyptian, and finally, the Israelite. Thus, it happened when the Magi came to the child, they were Magi by their religion, but Assyrians by their nationality and country as stated by Mar Narsai, the great Assyrian teacher from Ein Dolbi (Present day Dohuk, Iraq) in his hymn on Virgin Mary and the Magi:

*"As Great Assyria realized, she called the Magi and told them
Take with you offerings and go to praise the great king that is born in
Judea
Persia will rejoice with your announcement, and Assyria will be happy
with your procession
When the light of my son's kingdom shine, there will be peace among
you."*¹²

Again, Mar Narsai confirms the Assyrian identity of the Magi in his article on the birth of Jesus:

*Herod saw how much Assyrians degraded him
And he poured his anger on the children without mercy.*¹³

¹⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*, transl. Harry Carter, Book Seven (New York: The Heritage Press, 1958), 431.

¹¹ Isaiah, 19:24

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¹³ Homilies of Mar Narsai, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Patriarchal Press, 1970), 92.

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The reader knows that Christ was born 612 years after the fall of the kingdom of Nineveh. Mar Narsai passed away in the fourth century AD and yet he refers to the Magi by their national Assyrian name.

Even Mar Aprim before Mar Narsai verifies the Assyrian identity of the Magi. In certain hymns of Christmas, he confirms that Assyrians (Magi by their religion) brought gold and frankincense and myrrh. They did this as repentance for the sins of their ancestors who destroyed Israel and the holy temple.¹⁴

Even the great Mar Timotheus I,¹⁵ born in Hedayab (Adiabene) indirectly verifies the Assyrian identity of the Magi in his letter to Maranzkha, bishop of Nineveh:

*“When Jesus was two years old, we sent to his country delegates and gifts...we easterners were among the first to acknowledge and believe in him and we renewed our faith by the twelve delegates that followed the star and offered him gifts.”*¹⁶

And Jacob of Edessa who wrote the history named after him around the year 694 AD says:

*“The last Persian kingdom rose suddenly and became powerful.... And in the year 538¹⁷ of the Greeks it dominated all the Parthian kingdoms and I am saying Hurkanaye, Medians, Baharo, Hoozaye, Chaldeans and Assyrians.”*¹⁸

In the above paragraph, this historian from Edessa clearly reveals the presence of Assyria as a *kingdom* and Assyrians as a *people* in the third century.

We also have the famous Assyrian theologian Tatian of the Church of the East who lived in the second century, mentioned by Rev. Adam Akraya, the head of Rabban Hormizd Monastery in his book, the Chaldean Dogmas, saying:¹⁹

¹⁴ Des Heiligen, *Ephraem Des Syrsers – Hymnen de Nativitae (Epiphania)* (Edmund Beck, Louvain, 1959), 99 ; Kathleen E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 166-168.

¹⁵ Patriarch of Church of the East, 780 – 820 AD.

¹⁶ Oscar Braun, *Letters De Tamothee*, (Louvain, 1953) 142.

¹⁷ = 227 AD

¹⁸ Dr. Joseph Habbi, *Syriac Chronicles*. Translation and comments, (Baghdad, Iraq, 1982), 75.

¹⁹ L'Abbé Albert Aboona, *History of Church of the East*, (Beyrouth: Dar Almchriq, 1973), 192.

²⁰ Severus was born in the territory of Pisidia in about 459 AD. He was schooled in languages and sciences in Alexandria, Egypt where he lived for a period in the desert. He was ordained bishop in the year 512 In 518 he was removed from his chair by the Byzantian emperor, Ustinus I. Then he escaped to Egypt and from his exile he

“Seware [Severus] accepted the teachings of the famous Titian, the Assyrian who lived in the second century of the church.”²⁰

This Seware is not from the Antioch society nor is he the Severus patriarch and shepherd of the Syrian Jacobites. The name Tasinous, just like the names of tens of other Assyrians who lived in the western part, were changed and modified to sound Greek.

Mar Ishoyabh III, Catholicos Patriarch of the Church of the East (647 – 657 AD) in his epistle to different bishops of his diocese mentions Assyria and Assyrians numerous times as we note in the following:

- Epistle to Bishop Mar Goriel:

“It should be known generally, that here and in the middle of Assyria and the people close by”

- Epistle to the clergy of Bet Lapat of the Huzaye:

“ But she that is honored, we see spiritually, as Assyria and Elam are united in one body.”

- Epistle to Bishop Theodorus:

*“I will be delayed for a few days until I visit those scattered people of Assyria outside this territory.”*²¹

And the great Mar Timothy in his epistle to Bishop Sargis of Elam says:

*“To our brothers Khnanisho and Ishosawran we have written twice and this by the law of God's word. Even if they do not wish to come, the Assyrians will honor them.”*²²

The Assyrian poet, Gewargis Warda of Arbil who lived in the 13th century, in his famous hymn “Yea Listener of Prayers” used on Wednesday of the Ninevite rogation is asking the Lord to accept the rogation and the fasting of the Christian people leaders of his Eastern Church:

managed his people for twenty years against the Chalcedonians until 538. See the following references:

Ignatious Ephram First Barsoum, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, (1897 – 1957) *History of Syriac Sciences and Literature* (Damascus, Syria: Sidawi Printing House, 1961), 237; *History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*, translated by Prof. Matti Moosa (Passeggiata Press, Colorado, USA, 2000); L'Abbé. Albert Aboona, *History of Church of the East*, (Mosul, Iraq: Modern Press, 1973), 109; *Compendium Conciliorum Œcumenicorum, Undecim*, (Paris, France, 1888), 73.

²¹ R. Duval, *Ishoyahb Patriarche, Liber Epistularum*, (Louvain: CSCO, 1962), 102, 106.

²² L'Abbé Jacques Eugène Manna, *Morceaux Choisis de Littérature Aramaéenne*, vol. 1 (Mossoul, Mesopotamia : Imprimerie Des Pères Dominicains, 1901), 34.

²³ Mar Abdisho d'Suwa, *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, (Mosul, Iraq: Assyrian Press of the Church of the East, 1924), 96.

Lord; heed to the rogation of Babylonians and Assyrians

Now that the church leadership is in confused order....

Lord: heed to the rogation of the poor people of our country

That is glorifying your Godhead and are asking you for forgiveness

This Warda who died in the year 1300 AD is asking God to accept the rogation of Babylonians and Assyrians because those who are offering the rogation are a people and not a geographical area.

In his hymn on the Catholicos Patriarch of the East, Gewargis Warda lists the names of some by the title Assyrian or from the land of Assyria as we quote below:²³

“Mar Mari the Assyrian”²⁴, whose race is a sweet name²⁵

And Odisho the Assyrian, whose race is noble²⁶

That served the seat of Šuwā and rose to apostolic office

And Makikha,²⁷ the zealous, a just and virtuous man

In Assyria he became a prelate and a Catholicos according to the law

And Elia, full of successes who was raised in the house of educators

In Assyria the land of knowledge, and was included in the company of justices.”

For a variety of reasons, the inhabitants of Babylonia and Assyria were known by different religious and ethnic appellations such as Nestorians, Chaldeans and Christians. Testifying in this regard, the well-known Metropolitan Yosip Seman Assemani (1687 – 1768) the Lebanese states:

“Chaldeans are Assyrians and were generally known as Easterners and Nestorians.”²⁸

The land of Assyria especially the northern territories, was inhabited by Assyrians after the occupation of Persians and Parthians who were sympathetic to the natives of the land and allowed them to rebuild their ancient cities and villages. They plowed the land and became prosperous and preserved their language and national and cultural identity. The Persians themselves trusted the

²⁴ In Mar Odisho’s works, in fact in many other works in Assyrian (Aramaic) language quoted herein, the terms of ‘Assyrian’ and ‘Assyria’ are ‘Athuraya’ and ‘Athur’, respectively.

²⁵ Patriarch of the Church of the East 987 – 1000.

²⁶ Patriarch of the Church of the East 1072 – 1090.

²⁷ Patriarch of the Church of the East 1092 – 1108.

²⁸ *Al-Machriq*, “Revue Catholique Orientale Mensuelle,” 2, no. 3 (Beyrouth, 1899): 97.

Assyrians in the leadership of their forces such as Mar Kardagh²⁹ and Daddo, Commander-in-chief of Media.³⁰ Also in the governorships of provinces such as Hedayab and Assyria whose capital became Calah, the ancient capital of Assyrians. In the middle of the fourth century AD, Sennacherib the father of Mar Bahnam and his sister Sarah who became martyrs in 352,³¹ ruled the city of Nimrod (Calah).

It is appropriate that we carefully consider the above-mentioned evidence, which confirms that in the fourth century there was an Assyrian ruler by the name of Sennacherib who governed in the city of Nimrod. Here one has the legitimate right to ask: how could there be an Assyrian ruler (king) of a city in the 4th century A.D. without Assyrian people or citizenry? And in the synod of Mar Išoyahb,³² held in the year 585, we see signatures of Archdeacon Mar Awa, representative of Mar Khnana, Metropolitan of Assyrians.³³

Rev. Petros Nasri states: "... and Gregory Bar Hebraeus while discussing the eastern and western Syriac dialects, points out that the pronunciation of the easterners is older and more accurate and he verifies that they are the children of Chaldeans."³⁴

In the codex of Cardinal Amolis to the committee of cardinals in the Tredando conference dated February 19, 1562 about Patriarch Odisho Bar Yokhanan Bet Maron from the city of Jezirah we read: "Honorable Mar Odisho

²⁹ Paulus Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum Et Sanctorum* vol. 2 (Leipzig: Typis Guilielmi Drugulini, 1890), 443.

³⁰ L'Abbe Petros Nasri, *Histoire, Des Eglises Chaldeenne Et Syrienne, vol. 1* (Mossoul: Imprimerie Des Pères Dominicains, 1905), 79.

³¹ L'Abbé Jacques Eugène Manna, *Morceaux Choisis de Littérature Aramaéenne*, vol. 1, 322 ; Sa Grandeur Addai Scher, *Vae De Saints Maryres D'oraent*, (Mossoul: Imprimerie Des Pères Dominicains, , 1900).

³² Patriarch of the Church of the East (581-595)

³³ Braun, *Das Buch de Synhados*, (Stuttgart, Wien, 1900); J.B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale. Recueil De Synodes Nestorien*, (Paris, 1902),131 ;*The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl)*, translated from Syriac by Mar Eshai Shimon XXIII Patriach of the East, (Trichur, India : Mar Narsai Press, 1965), App."A" 155.

³⁴ *Al-Machriq*, "Revue Catholique Orientale Mensuelle" 2, no. 3 (Beyrouth, 1899), 97
"As for the language, it is Aramaic or Chaldean also known as the Eastern Syriac. With regards to the Eastern Syriac, maintained until this very day among the Eastern Syrians (who are the Chaldeans or the Babylonians and Assyrians) it is the authentic old language. This authenticity is substantiated by some prominent Western Syrian scholars such as Gregory Bar Hebraeus ابن العبري "

Patriarch of *Assyrians* who has been elected by the clergy and approved by their people...”³⁵

It is necessary to carefully consider the above statement. Cardinal Amolis in the year 1562 (long before the westerners had given this name to us in the beginning of the 20th century according to Joseph's claim) says that Mar Odisho was the patriarch of *Assyrians* and he was elected by the clergy and with the approval of the *Assyrian* people. Doubtless, the Cardinal is very specific in his reference to the geographical territory of Assyria and to its Assyrian inhabitants. Anyone who knows this language completely will confess to this truth.

- **Continuous existence of Assyrian civilization**

During the Parthians' rule of Assyria (126 – 227 BC), the Assyrians rebuilt their ancient cities in northern Assyria such as Nuzi, Kakazoo and Shibaniba. Even Ashur was restored and became a great city as in the days of the Assyrian Empire and god Ashur was worshiped reverently by the Assyrians in his temple in his city Ashur. If there were no Assyrians in the days of Parthians, then who were the people that rebuilt the temple of Ashur and worshiped him? Even the Assyrian cuneiform writing was used there in those days. The last copy of this writing that has survived and is in our hands is dated 74-75 AD.³⁶

Large numbers of Assyrians accepted Christianity, first in Erbil and Ctesiphon. Their priests were accepted as the leaders of the church and their houses of worship as Christian churches. From here originated the general resemblance of the churches in Mesopotamia to the ancient architecture of Assyrians and Babylonians houses of worship and not to the Hellenistic style.³⁷

After the disaster inflicted by the Persian king, Shapur II, the Church of the East grew stronger in Assyria. Some metropolitans and patriarchs called themselves Assyrians, and the bishop's seat in Nineveh as the Nineveh Episcopacy and Metropolitan of Assyria. One of them was bishop Mar Sabrisho, (later became patriarch Catholicos in the year 596) who instituted the fasting and the ritual of the Ninevites Rogation. Afterwards, Monk Yaqqira compiled the hymns of rogation from the writings of Mar Narsai and Mar Aprim. In these passages that are read yearly in the Assyrian, Chaldean and Jacobite churches, especially those relating to Mar Aprim, the reader will see a new imprint that is seldom seen in the writings of this man. In the hymns of rogation there is great praise and exaltation for the Assyrians and their kings, their clergy and their judges and obvious downgrading of the prophets, clergy, kings and the

³⁵ Dr. Sarhad Jammo, “The Two Branches of the Eastern Church,” *Bayn-Al-Nahrayn* 95/96 (Baghdad: 1996): 196.

³⁶ Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Penguin Books, Third Edition, 1992), 420.

³⁷ Dr. Joseph Habbi, *The Church of the East* (Baghdad, Iraq: 1989), 146.

elders of Israel. Thus one can say that Mar Sabhrisho, and monk Yaqqira and patriarch Ishoyabh were *Assyrians* filled with national pride. These men added more than two hundred pages in the book of *khudra* to preserve that ancient Assyrian event as a rite never to be forgotten in all churches. One of these hymns that the Assyrians have sung yearly from those times to the present is the patriotic hymn that we see in the second article of Tuesday on the language of the Assyrian king as he addresses his forces:³⁸

*“Even the mighty tremble from the great fame of Assyria:
We that conquered the greats, a Hebrew [Jonah] conquer us:
Our voice made the kings shudder, and his voice agitate us:
Many cities we destroyed, and he in our city conquer us:
Nineveh the mother of heroes, from a coward will be afraid:
Lionhearted in birth, from a Hebrew is scarred:
Assyria roared on the earth, and Jonah will roar at it:
Such feebleness has humbled the offspring of Nimrod the Great”*

The author of the rogation hymns also says:

*He saw children [of Nineveh] shouting, and calves and lambs bellowing:
He saw old people [of Nineveh] weeping, and the old people of his
nation (Hebrews) fornicating:
He saw Nineveh in sorrow and Zion attired with debauchery:
He saw Assyria and rejected prideful Jerusalem
He saw the impudent in Nineveh, capitulate and learned the truth
In Zion he saw liar prophets, full of evil.”*

Even the simple ceremony that our ancestors celebrated in their homeland Hakkari on April 1st as they hung bouquets of flowers, greens on the entrance doors of their homes and called it the “*beard of Nissan*,” was not but continuation of the great ceremony of Akitu, the New Year of Assyrians which falls on the beginning of Nissan [April]. If our fathers were not from the same origin or ancestry of Assyrians they would not have kept this legend alive and celebrated it until this time.

With regards to Joseph’s quotation from Fiey stating: “...and have had to align some 50 pages of proper names of people; there is not a single writer who has an ‘Assyrian’ name”, this is the least defensible argument a researcher can put forth in arguing for or against the ethnic characteristics of a given ethnic identity. For any given culture or ethnic group throughout the world the aspect of the ethnic identity that is more vulnerable to change is the change of proper names and even their total loss. Does Joseph expect that the Assyrians of today maintain their names of over two thousand years ago? With the advent of

³⁸ Breviarium, IUXSTA, Ritum Syrorum Orientalium ID Est Chaldaeorum, A Pentecoste AD Dedicacionem. Apud S. Congregationem “Pro Ecclesia Orientali, Romae, 1938.

Christianity, there were scores of different ethnic and nationalistic groups that entered the new religion. Upon their adoption of Christianity, the religious, cultural and even linguistic differences among such diverse groups were ironed out. It is, therefore, quite natural that all names such as Ashur, Sennacherib, Banipal, Esarhaddon, Sargon etc. be replaced by Abd-Isho', Isho'-Yahb, Sabr-Isho', Henan-Isho', You-Ḥannan, Mattai, Luqa etc.³⁹

If truthfully there were no Assyrian names in the listing of Rev. Fiey, this is because the writers in the past were priests, monks, and leaders of the church, when they were young and in monastery schools, the monks used to alter their names and take on religious names. This practice is common among us even today. It is important to mention that the Greeks injected many pronunciations, names, and numerous words in our written language. It is common for the Greeks to change the names of rivers, cities, and countries to match the characteristics of their language. We have examples of the listing of Assyrian kings which are mentioned by Elia Bar-Qenaya (died in 1046) based on writers such as Eusebius, Aneus, and Andronekous that include forty names which do not match the Assyrian names in pronunciation.⁴⁰

Today, a name has no weight or significance to determine the national identity because the names, languages, and cultures have been intermixed in our times. As the psalmist said:

*“They mingled with the nations and adopted their customs.”*⁴¹

Christian Assyrians distanced themselves from the names of kings, generals and gods of Assyrians because their religious books and rites and even the Bible portrayed ancient Assyrians as pagans, apostates, murderers, sinners and damned.

- *“O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.”*⁴²
- *“The God who saved Hezekiah,
Delivered Jerusalem from Assyrian.”*⁴³

³⁹ For details of linguistic and ethnic changes in reshaping the modern Assyrian ethnic identity see Edward Odisho, *The Sound System of Modern Assyrian*, Wiebaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988; idem, “The Ethnic, Linguistic and Cultural Identity of Modern Assyrians,” in *Mythology and Mythologies: Melammu Symposia II*, The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project (Helsinki, 2001).

⁴⁰ Joseph Habbi, *Elia Bar-Senaya, History, Opus Chronologicum* (Baghdad, 1975), 42.

⁴¹ Psalm 106:35.

⁴² Psalm 137:8-9.

If the children of Sennacherib were, for centuries, taught to pray and damn Babylon and Assyria, how does the researcher expect from people who wholeheartedly accepted the Christian faith to name their children Ashur and Esarhaddon?

As we mentioned, in many Assyrian cities and villages, temples and their priests became the churches and priests for Christianity. Assyrians accepted the Gospel of the Lord in Mesopotamia. Prayers, praises, and glorifications that were sung by Assyrian priests passed into Christianity. These prayers were prayed and sung in the same buildings and by the same people and in the same language and same melodies. Many of the praises of the Assyrian cities were accepted during the first Christian century and in time they constituted the foundation of *Khudra*.⁴⁴

Below we quote certain prayers and praises that Assyrians used to offer to the powers of heaven before and after the birth of Christianity. The prudent reader will see clearly the similarities between them.

1. Prayers before Christianity

- The psalm prayer in the praise of god Enlil who was worshiped in the fourth millennium in the city of Nippur:

*“By the light of his wisdom he enlightens all the people. The earthly powers bow their heads with respect and worship him because truthfully he is god and he is great and glorified.”*⁴⁵

- Psalm praising Shamash

*“Because he alone is the just god and is the sun of righteousness. He balances the annual crops of winter and summer for the nourishment of humanity and animals. He sends clouds that carry rain and gentle showers for the watering of grains and vegetables”*⁴⁶

- Praise to Marduck the son of god Ea

*“Pity us with your mercy lord god Marduck, comfort us all, The only begotten son of Ea, because your name is god and you are above all the names on earth and in heaven.”*⁴⁷

⁴³ Breviarium, IUXSTA, Ritum Syrorum Orientalium ID Est Chaldaeorum, A Pentecoste AD Dedicacionem. (Apud S. Congregationem “Pro Ecclesia Orientali, Romae, 1938), 389.

⁴⁴ Khudra is the formal book of prayers of the priests

⁴⁵ Ibrahim Gabriel Sowmy, *Marduthu D’Suryoye*, (San Paulo, Brazil, 1986), 30,33.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

2. Prayers after the adoption of Christianity

- “Merciful God, pardon the children who are gazing and waiting for your rain and its drops, Give them with your mercy the rain of grace.”
- “Rise Lord of the worlds, protect us from those who hate us and do not know you, and put them to shame. Let the inhabitants of the universe realize that you are powerful, fearful, glorified and you do miracles”
- “The light of life and the truth that enlightens all the borders of the creation. With your love make friendship with us and let your peace settle on the world.”⁴⁸
- **Objective Conclusions**

We have briefly mentioned under the previous two headings some historical statements and pieces of evidence extracted from writings and manuscripts that have covered the identity and existence of the Assyrian people in all centuries until the present day. Also mentioned are the customs, characteristics, names, traditions, and some language changes, etc. We now return to Joseph’s significant statement quoted below:

*“There was nothing “Assyrian” left to be read and remembered. The time came, when the Akkadian inscriptions on clay were meaningless to the great majority of the population in Mesopotamia.”*⁴⁹

This claim is not based on truth or a sound academic foundation. Because we have plenty of evidence that reminds us of Assyrians if we are just and objective and not biased due to politics, nationalism and denominational orientation. We documented in the paragraphs dealing with historical evidence the continued existence of the civilization of Assyrians in this study and if necessity demands, we can demonstrate other evidence relative to existence of news and historical memories of Nineveh till present. We ask all the scholars if there is another nation that uses the names of the months used in Akkad except for the Assyrian nation, such as Nisanu (Nissan), Ayaru (Ayar), Tammuzu (Tamuz), Abu (Ab), Ululu (Ulul), Teshri, Shwat, and Addaru (Addar).⁵⁰ (Later on, these names were adopted by Hebrews and Arabs)

Concerning the Akkadian inscriptions that were mentioned by George Roux as without significance...etc, and on which Dr. Joseph relied to strengthen his

⁴⁸ Breviarium, IUXSTA, Ritum Syrorum Orientalium ID Est Chaldaeorum, A Pentecoste AD Dedicacionem. (Apud S. Congregationem “Pro Ecclesia Orientali, Romae, 1938).

⁴⁹ Joseph, Assyria and Syria: Synonyms?, 72.

⁵⁰ Prof. Amer Sulaiman, *Akkadian Lanaguage: Babylonian-Assyrian, (Mosul, 1991), 59.*

opinion, we think that Roux stated this to show the change and cultural evolution that developed among the Assyrian people during the last few centuries before and after Christianity. Assyrians abandoned the difficult cuneiform writing and forgot reading and writing it after they adopted the alphabetical writing. His purpose was not to express the extinction of Assyrians as a people.

Certainly, Dr. Joseph is aware that evolution is a natural trend in the life of human beings and civilizations. It is quite axiomatic to abandon the difficult and replace it with the simple. It is not plausible to assume that every nation that changes its writing system, language or religion is being wiped out from the face of the earth. What should we say about many European nations of today whose ancestors spoke, read and wrote in Latin a few centuries back? Is it possible to say that the Italians, French, Spaniards and Portuguese are not the descendants of the same people before the fifteenth century because they abandoned the Latin language? By the same token, the Assyrian people continue to live in their homeland, Assyria and they still speak the Assyrian (Aramaic). In fact, the Assyrian language of Edessa (Orhai) is still the official language of their religious services. The change in writing from the cuneiform to the alphabetic and the departure from the Assyrian language in favor of Aramaic and the acceptance of the local dialect of Edessa (Orhai) was partly attributed to evolution and partly to their adoption of Christianity and the renowned writer Rafael Babo Iskhag confirms this truth when he says:

*“The Christians of Iraq succeeded in the learning of the Aramaic language from the beginning of Christianity, their leaders did their utmost to teach it to the children of their parishes to encourage them to read the holy books.”*⁵¹

In response to the almost exclusive dependence of Joseph on western scholars, it is appropriate to cite Bar Soma’s comments in this regard:

*“What these western scholars and their institutions and universities think about our history, religion, race, origin, and nationality is not true. This is because many of them are not knowledgeable about our culture, literature and language and they are not honest in the expression of their opinions. Because of this, they have no right to deny what the easterners think of themselves. Easterners too are also learned people and owners of many testaments; they are in their thoughts and diligence about the truth no lesser than those of their profession in the west.”*⁵²

⁵¹ Rofael Baboo Isaac, *The Old Schools of Iraq*, (Baghdad, 1955), 38.

⁵² Patriarch Ignatious Ephram I Barsoum, *The Shinning Pearl*, 2nd ed. (Baghdad, Iraq, 1976), 483.

With all of this evidence, if someone says, these people are not Assyrian, our response would be: if these people are not Assyrian, then there is no doubt that they were one of the ancient people whose neighbors were Persians, Greeks, Khuraye, Medians, Turks, Arabs, Kurds, etc.

Assyrians are the possessor of a renowned civilization, culture and heritage. It is not possible that its origin is from one of the invading neighbors for this reason. The original countries of invading foreign neighbors are known before they invaded Assyria. They did not change their name and language and did not deny their original country during the period that they stayed in Assyria.

- **Supplemental Evidence**

The following are further quotations from some eastern scholars and orientalist, who attest to a more objective understanding of the nature of connection and continuity between the ancient and modern Assyrians.

Sa Grandeur Mgr. David, Archevêque Syrien De Damas, quotes Renan, the French scholar, says:

*“Syria is not but a contraction of Assyria or Assyrian; this according to the Greek pronunciation. The Greeks applied this name to all of Asia Minor.”*⁵³

Even Fiey on whom Joseph depends so much, acknowledges that since the 16th century (Four centuries before the westerners gave the Nestorians this name) the Assyrians or *Athurians* have been called by this name in certain documents and letters of the Roman church to the Christians of the mountains and their patriarchy, which is located in Qudshanis.⁵⁴

Rev. Sarhad Jammo also verifies that

*“It was not the Anglicans who were the first to call the followers of the Church of the East by the name Assyrians. This appeared in letters exchanged between the Roman See and the Church of the East three centuries before the Anglicans had exchanges with the Church of the East.”*⁵⁵

Rev. Kuryakous Makhnook after discussing the might of Assyrian and Babylonian kingdoms, says:

⁵³ Sa Grandeur Mgr. David, Archevêque Syrien De Damas, *Grammair De La Langue Araméenne Selon Les Deux Dialects Syriaque Et Chaldaïque* Vol. 1., (Imprimerie Des Pères Dominicains, Mossoul, 1896), 12.

⁵⁴ John M Fiey, *Eastern Syrian Church*, (Translated to Arabic by Father Chamile Hushaima, Beyrouth, 1990), 38

⁵⁵ Dr. Sarhad Jammo, 201.

*“But this mighty nation even though it lost its kingdom and changed its beauty, it still maintains its national identity and original language. The Christians who are now the inhabitants in the land of Assyria, Babylon, Jazirah, and Kurdistan are the children of the same mighty nation and no one has the right to separate them from it.”*⁵⁶

And about their language he says:

*“Their original language is Aramaic or Chaldean and the eastern Assyrian language has been preserved till today by the Syrians who are Babylonians and Assyrians.”*⁵⁷

Also with reference to an article by Mar Ignatius Aprim II, Patriarch of the Syrian Jacobites and his speech on Assyrian Kingdom, Rev. Kuryakus mentions:

*“This article is published in the Oriental Archeology magazine that was edited by his Holiness the above-mentioned patriarch, in memory of his country Iraq and in which he told his associates that their grandparents were Assyrians with glory and courage and respect.”*⁵⁸

Rev. Jamoo while talking about the decline of the Church of the East in days of the Mongolians and its concentration in the mountains of Assyria, states::

*“After the expansion of the Church of the East in all the territories of Babylon, Persia, Assyria, India, China, and Tibet; by the end of the 13th century, it began to protect its identity in the north of Mesopotamia and in the mountains on the border of Persia and Turkey. Thus it returned to the provinces from which its people originated. And those people are the descendants of Chaldea and Assyria.”*⁵⁹

Metropolitan Addai Scher, says about the Assyrians and the names consequently given to them by the foreigners.

“They have many names in history. They were called Arameans due to their relationship with Aram the son of Shem who settled in this country and populated it with his offspring. They were called Persians, due to the fact that they became subject of the Persian Kingdom. They were known as Easterners because they dwelled in the East and Nestorians for accepting the teaching of Nestorus. They were also called Byzantines to distinguish them from the western

⁵⁶ Al-Machriq, Revue Catholique Orientale Mensuelle, 97.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 634.

⁵⁹ Dr. Sarhad Jammo, 188.

*Assyrians who they called Jacobites. However, their original name is Chaldeans and Assyrians and they are such by race and country.*⁶⁰

We see Rev. John Fiey contradicting himself when he used the name Nestorian and then Assyrian in his article published in the Syriac Dialogue: Pro Oriente, while talking about the Christians in India who are divided into many groups saying:

“Coming back to the main stream of the Church of the East, their hereditary patriarch, henceforth known as Mar Shimun, took refuge in 1672, at Qudsanés in the high mountain of Hakkari, in Southern Turkey.

The last drama occurred in 1915, when the proud fighters of the Assyrian tribes, dwelling in the Hakkari mountains were forced to leave by the Ottomans and the Kurds. Tribes of Tiyari, of Tkhuma, of Djilu, of Baz, and the small patriarchal tribe of Dez, together with minor groups, had to leave their fatherland.”

*They are living now scattered around the World; in face of the danger of assimilation by their environment. The “Assyrians” (as they are called now) try to preserve, not only their faith, but also their language and their culture.*⁶¹

Rev. Paṭros Naṣri comments on the different national names given to the Assyrians by saying:

*“The adherents of the Assyrian Church of the East in the past centuries were called, sometimes Arameans, for a period Assyrians, and other times Chaldeans and Nestorians.”*⁶²

As to the reason why Assyrians are called Syrians, Rev. Paṭros Naṣri gives many reasons, one of which is:

*“Because the Syriac language is Assyrian (the word suraya without any doubt is derived from Assyrian according to the opinion of Herodot the historian) it was the language of those eastern territories, and it is a known fact that languages give their names to the people.”*⁶³

⁶⁰ Sa Grandeur Mgr. Addai Scher, *De La Chaldee Et De L'assyrie* Vol. 2, (Imprimerie Catholique, Beyrouht, 1913), 5.

⁶¹ *Syriac Dialogue, Pro Oriente*, Ferdinand Berger & Sohne Ges. M.b.h., (Horn, Austria: 1994), 105.

⁶² L'Abbe Paṭros Naṣri, *Histoire, Des Eglises Chaldeenne Et Syrienne, vol. 1*, (Mossoul: Imprimerie Des Pères Dominicains, 1905), 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 28.

Thus we can say that the name “Suryaya” is not a national designation. It is the name of a language that was adopted by some Assyrians. Just as Chaldean is the name of a profession and an educational characteristic.