

ASSYRIAN IDENTITY IN ANCIENT TIMES AND TODAY¹

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Introduction

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was a multi-ethnic state composed of many peoples and tribes of different origins (cf. Postgate 1989). Its ethnic diversity notwithstanding, it was a uniformly structured political entity with well-defined and well-guarded borders,² and the Assyrian kings certainly regarded it as a unified whole, "the land of Aššur", whose territory they constantly strove to expand (Tadmor 1999; see also below). To the outside world, it likewise was a unified, monolithic whole, whose inhabitants were unhesitatingly identified as Assyrians regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.³

However, just how far did the masses of the Empire's population actually share the Assyrian identity? Did they consider themselves as members of the Assyrian nation, identifying with the ideals and ways of life of the Assyrian ruling class, or did they rather identify themselves in terms of their diverse ethnic origins, loathing and resenting the Assyrian rule and way of life? I shall try to answer these questions by first considering the matter briefly from a theoretical perspective and then reviewing the available evidence, both Assyrian and post-Assyrian, in detail.

1. The Role of Ethnicity in Multi-ethnic States

Contrary to what one might be prone to think, national and ethnic identities⁴ are not mutually exclusive, nor does the former depend on the latter. Most citizens of multi-ethnic

1. For the bibliographical abbreviations see H. D. Baker (ed.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Vol. 2/II, Helsinki, 2001, B28-32.

2. The "border" or "territory" (*mišru, tahūmu*) of Assyria is referred to over 300 times in Neo-Assyrian sources; "crossing" or "violating" it is referred to 15 times. The frontiers of the Empire were heavily garrisoned (Parker 1997) and their crossing points well guarded (see, e.g., SAA 1 186-187 and NL 40; SAA 16 148). Extradition of fugitives and political refugees from Assyria was a standard clause in Neo-Assyrian treaties and a recurrent topic in Neo-Assyrian administrative correspondence. The relevant contexts make it clear that the term "territory of Assyria" denoted areas permanently incorporated into the provincial system of Assyria, as opposed to non-annexed vassal or allied states, which had borders of their own.

3. Cf., e.g., Isaiah 7:18-20 and 8:7. In *ABL* 1430, a letter from Babylonia from the time of Assurbanipal, eight Assyrians (LU.as-sur.KLMES) are referred to by name; four of them have non-Akkadian, mostly Aramaic names (Idriya, Sabini, Sames-idri, Ubarsayasu).

4. By "national identity" I understand "national collective identity" in the sense of Hall 1999, but differently from Hall, I believe that such identities already existed in ancient societies, long before the rise of nineteenth-century nationalism (see below). By "ethnic identity" I understand, with Alba 1990, 25, an individual's subjective orientation toward his or her ethnic origins.

states have, in addition to their national identity, one or more secondary ethnic identities (Vassady 1989, 47-48; Alba 1990, 41; 50).⁵ To take an obvious example, first-generation American immigrants generally maintain a strong attachment to their home countries but, after many years in the country, may start developing a secondary American identity (Kivisto and Blanck 1990, 115, contra Hansen 1937b [1990], 205-207). Their children, who were born in the country, are Americans by birth; but they still (often subconsciously) maintain a strong ethnic identity, having been exposed as children to their parents' native language and cultural heritage (Alba 1990, 22; 25).⁶ In the third generation and later, ethnic consciousness recedes to the background, without necessarily disappearing altogether (Kivisto and Blanck 1990; Alba 1990, *passim*, especially the on pp. 64 and 68).⁷ The development of national identity thus goes hand in hand with language acquisition and social integration. The moment an individual fully masters the language of the country he (or she) lives in, and has internalised its customs, traditions, values and religious beliefs, he (or she) becomes a fully integrated member of the society and, consciously or not, shares its collective identity (Hall 1999, 34-36). The whole process takes a *maximum of three generations* to complete and is by no means limited to the United States only but is universal (e.g., Deniz 1999).

The presence of ethnic communities in the host country may help maintain the ethnic identities of immigrants and their descendants, but it cannot halt, slow down or reverse the assimilation process (Kivisto 1989; Odisho 1999). Any ethnic shift usually begins with acculturation and ends up with assimilation.⁸ Ethnic consciousness is, however, related to education so that educated people may cultivate an inherited or adopted ethnic identity long after the critical three-generation limit (Alba 1990, 29). It is also related to social discrimination and persecution, so that oppressed and persecuted ethnic minorities may develop stronger identities than undisturbed ones (cf. Alba 1990, 27; Hall 1999, 34).

5. Ethnic identity naturally constitutes only one of the several secondary identities an individual may have. "An individual can be simultaneously a male, a Polish American, a father, and a plumber" (Alba 1990, 23)-one could add, a Catholic, and many other things. Many people are strongly attached to a particular family, city or city quarter.

6. Hansen (1937a) argued that the second generation, keenly aware of the contempt in which the foreign accents and customs of their parents were held, did their utmost to forget their ethnic heritage. In his words, "Nothing is more Yankee than a Yankeeized person of foreign descent" (1937a [1990], 194). However, this view needs tempering as too extreme.

7. Hansen postulated a general resurgence of ethnic consciousness in the third generation. His famous thesis of a third-generation return to ethnicity ("What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember", Hansen 1937a [1990], 195) is, however, not borne out by facts, see Kivisto and Blanck 1990.

8. I owe this observation to Edward Y. Odisho.

2. The Shaping of Assyrian Identity in the First Millennium BC

To return now to Assyria, there cannot be any question that it was and remained a multi-ethnic society, and many of its ethnic minorities seem to have retained their identities (at least to some extent) till the very end of the Empire. For example, legal documents from Assur, Nineveh, and Dur-Katlimmu on the Habur dating from the last decades of the Empire mention numerous Assyrian citizens identified or identifiable as Egyptians, Israelites, Arabs, Anatolians and Iranians on the basis of their names or the ethnic labels attached to them. It is questionable, however, how far these ethnic names and labels actually reflect ethnic consciousness and ethnicity (Zadok 1997). Ethnonyms like Arbāyu "Arab", Mādāyu "Mede", Muṣurāyu "Egyptian", and Uraṛṭāyu "Urartian" are from the late eighth century on frequently borne by fully Assyrianized, affluent individuals in high positions. The sons of all the three men with Israelite names mentioned in texts from Dur-Katlimmu had Aramaic or Akkadian names (Radner 2002, no. 37; cf. Lawson Younger 2003, 66). Certain parts of the Empire, such as Babylonia, were for political and ideological reasons allowed to keep their traditional institutions and administrative infrastructures, which naturally helped preserve their ethnic identities.⁹ In addition, some nomad tribes and a few ethnic pockets in inaccessible areas within the borders of Assyria may have never been fully brought under Assyrian rule. Thus it would be absurd to claim that every individual or group of people in Assyria shared the Assyrian identity.

On the other hand, it is an undeniable fact that from the latter part of the second millennium BC on, the population within the Empire's provincial system—that is, within

9. Babylonia (actually, "the land of Akkad") *de facto* became part of Assyria in 731 BC, when Tiglath-Pileser III, following a pattern already set by Shalmaneser III (858-824) and Adad-nerari III (810-783), invaded the country at the invitation of the clergy of Marduk and assumed the kingship of Babylon. Despite several revolts, the country was allowed to remain nominally independent till the end of the Empire. Parts of it (Dur-Šarrukku, Lahiru, Der, Ur, and the Sealand) were, however, annexed to Assyria as provinces already in the eighth century, and the whole country was incorporated into the provincial system in 656 at the latest (see Frame 1992, 271, for the eponym officials of the years 656, 645 (643), and 633, all of them entitled "governor (*pāhutu*) of Babylon"), but probably much earlier. An Assyrian governor of Babylon exercising control over the entire "land of Akkad" is already attested in 710 and probably stayed in office until the last year of Sennacherib (681); see SAA 15 nos. 217-238 and the discussion *ibid.*, xx-xxiii and xxxviii. Under Esarhaddon, the governor of Babylon bore the traditional Babylonian title *šākin ṭēmi* (Frame 1992, 73). If this was part of Esarhaddon's reconciliatory Babylonian policy (Porter 1993, 38), then the reintroduction of an Assyrian *pāhutu* in 656 may well have triggered the Šamaš-šumu-ukin rebellion (652-648 BC).

Other annexed areas comparable to Babylonia were the Philistine city states and the kingdom of Hilakku (Cilicia), which functioned as buffer states against Egypt and Phrygia respectively and continued enjoying nominal independence despite recurrent revolts and despite the fact that they had *de facto* been incorporated in to the Assyrian provincial system (Otzen 1979, 255-256; Gitin 1995).

Assyria proper ¹⁰-was for centuries subject to a continuous and systematic process of assimilation and integration. Especially the policy of mass deportations introduced by Ashurnasirpal II and continued on a vastly increased scale by Shalmaneser III, TiglathPileser III and the Sargonid dynasty, utterly changed the political, demographic and linguistic map of the Near East. Between 830 and 640 BC, an estimated 4.5 million people from all parts of the Empire were removed from their homes and settled elsewhere, mostly in the Assyrian heartland and the big urban centers there (Oded 1979). These deportations may originally have had purely political and economic goals, but in the long run they ended up having far more extensive linguistic, social and cultural consequences.

2.1 The Aramaization of Assyria

In the first place, they brought hundreds of thousands of foreign, mostly Aramaic-speaking people into the Assyrian heartland and the eastern provinces of the Empire, thus turning the previously largely monolingual society of Assyria into a multilingual one. Within a relatively short period of time-already by the middle of the eighth century-Aramaic became established as a common language (*lingua franca*) throughout the Empire (Garelli 1982; Tadmor 1975, 1985; Eph'al 1999, 118-119). Concomitantly with this, the Assyrian administration started using the Aramaic alphabet alongside the cuneiform script. Aramean scribes writing on papyrus or parchment scrolls beside Assyrian scribes writing on clay tablets or waxed writing-boards are depicted on royal reliefs from the mideighth century on (Tadmor 1982, 1991), and Aramean scribes working with Assyrian ones are mentioned in administrative documents already half a century earlier. ¹¹ By about 700 BC, the Aramaic alphabet effectively replaced cuneiform as the Empire's everyday writing system (Parpola 1997b, xvi).

2.2 The Assyrianization of the Empire's Population

Secondly, the massive deportations of foreign people into Assyria, and the concomitant reorganization of the conquered areas as Assyrian provinces, subjected huge numbers of new people to a direct and ever-increasing Assyrian cultural influence. This included, among other things, the imposition of taxation and military service, a uniform calendar,

10. Cf. Postgate 1992, 252

11. See Appendix 1.

judiciary, and conscription system, as well as imperial weights, measures, and other standards (Parpola 2003b; for details see Postgate 1974 and 1976, 63-72; Radner 1999; Kaufman 1972; Levine 2003; Eph'al and Naveh 1993, 61-62; Gitin 1995; Lipiński 2000, 548). In addition, Assyrian royal ideology, religious ideas and mythology were incessantly propagated to all segments of the population through imperial art, emperor cult, religious festivals, and the cults of Aššur, Ištar, Nabû, Šin and other Assyrian gods (Porter 2000a and 2000b; Winter 1997; Watanabe 2002; Pongratz-Leisten 1997; Holloway 2001; Parpola 2000a, 2001; Parpola in press).¹² The peoples of the newly established provinces routinely became Assyrian citizens (Oded 1979, 81-91). While the process of Assyrianization thus put under way undoubtedly worked fastest in the big cities of central Assyria, it must have proceeded rapidly in the new provinces as well, as they were no longer the countries they used to be. Their intelligentsia had been deported to Assyria and replaced with Assyrian administrators, their capitals had been razed and rebuilt in Assyrian fashion, and their populations now included, in addition to deportees from other parts of the Empire, also considerable numbers of Assyrian immigrants and colonists.

2.3 The Social and Cultural Homogenization of the Empire

The intense acculturation process thus started continued for a period of more than two hundred years. It was boosted by intermarriages, participation in common military expeditions, building projects and business ventures, and continuous interaction between all segments of population in all aspects of daily life. As a result, at the same time as Aramaic developed into the *lingua franca* of the Empire and the use of the Aramaic alphabet in its administration steadily increased, its originally heterogeneous population became progressively homogeneous socially and culturally (Garelli 1982; Postgate 1992; Pedersen 1986).¹³ This development finds a perfect parallel in the social and cultural homogenization

12. Though people deported to Assyria were not prevented from practicing their religion in their new homeland, the annexation of a rebel country usually involved destruction of its main cult centre, pillage of its sacred objects and gods, and establishment of Assyrian cult centres in the rebuilt capital and elsewhere (Cogan 1974; Frame 1997; Parpola 2003b, 100-101). The images of the deported gods either received a permanent new home in Assyria and were incorporated in the pantheon of the Empire, or were recreated in the temple workshops of Assur in Assyrian fashion and returned to the annexed country along with a new theology (Nissinen and Parpola 2004).

13. The two *Hundurāya* families in Assur discussed by Pedersén (1986, 85-95) were deportees from the Iranian city of Hundur, settled in Assur in 714. Their sizable archives, which cover the years 681-618 BC, show that in less than one generation, they had become entirely Assyrianized in every respect, including their names. The same is true of the other archive discussed by Pedersén (1986, 125-129), that of the Egyptian colony at Assur, whose leaders had names such as

of the United States, which also involved the transformation of an initially multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural society into a uniform one through the adoption of a common *lingua franca* (American English). As in the United States, this process gradually obliterated all tensions that may have originally existed between various ethnic groups. In the end, the ethnic origins of the people became largely irrelevant, as evidenced by the Neo-Assyrian onomastics, which includes hundreds of Akkadian names adopted or given to their children by individuals bearing non-Akkadian names, as well as a fair number of Aramaic names given to their children by parents with Akkadian names (Garelli 1982, 441; Zadok 1997; Parpola in press).

2.4 The Internationalization and Bilingualism of the Assyrian Ruling Class

These developments cannot be dissociated from the progressive internationalization of the Neo-Assyrian ruling class (Parpola in press). While men with non-Akkadian names only sporadically appear in high state offices in the ninth century, they are frequently encountered on all levels of administration in the late eighth and seventh centuries BC (Tadmor 1975 and 1982; Oded 1979, 105-109; Garelli 1982; cf. Alba 1990, 6). These newcomers to the ruling class were carefully educated in Mesopotamian literature and culture, they dressed and behaved in the Assyrian way, and they spoke Akkadian and used the cuneiform script as distinctive markers of their social class. Their primary language of communication, however, like the rest of the Empire's, was certainly Aramaic, and the entire ruling class, including the royal family, must have been fully bilingual by the beginning of the seventh century at the very latest. All Neo-Assyrian kings from TiglathPileser III to Esarhaddon had Aramaic-speaking wives or mothers (Kamil 1999; Melville 1999; PNA s.w. Ataliā, Iaba and Naqī' a), and there are indications that at least some of them spoke Aramaic as their first language.

Seventh-century BC Assyria was thus divided into two major language groups: speakers of Aramaic-in practice, the entire population of the country-and speakers of Akkadian, including the largely bilingual inhabitants of the Assyrian heartland and the fully bilingual ruling class. This dichotomy was, however, largely social, not cultural, and it came to an end with the fall of the Empire and the subsequent massacre of the Assyrian

Urdu-Aššur "Servant of Aššur," Kišir-Aššur "Host of Aššur," and La-turammanni-Aššur "Do not forsake me, O Aššur!"

aristocracy. Although Neo-Assyrian certainly continued to be spoken and written in Harran at least until the end of the reign of Nabonidus (539 BC; Schaudig 2001, 73), Aramaic now fast became the only language spoken in Assyria outside the Assyrian heartland, and eventually in the latter as well.

2.5 The Creation of Assyrian National Identity

Ethnic identities develop spontaneously. National identities, however, especially those of multi-ethnic states, are consciously and systematically *created*. That is why some social historians like Rodney Hall argue that national identities are the product of modern times and did not exist in "territorial-sovereign" states, which dominated the international order prior to the nineteenth century. Hall believes that the abstract notion of *citizenship*, which he correctly sees as the necessary precondition for the development of national identity, came about only with eighteenth-century nationalism; consequently, he sees "nation building" as a central characteristic of the modern nation-states only, which rely on the "imagined community" of the *nation* as a legitimising principle rather than on dynastic legitimising principles (Hall 1999, 4-5). It should be noted, however, that nationalism and the concepts of nation and citizenship are by no means new phenomena but already played an important role in the ancient world, not only in ancient Athens (cf. Coleman 1997) and Rome but also in ancient Mesopotamia. In view of the considerable benefits that came with the citizenship of Rome, for example (Crawford 1996), it would be absurd to claim that the average Roman citizen did not consider himself Roman or did not share the national collective identity of Rome.

As regards Assyria specifically, the concept of Assyrian citizenship was central to its expansion, and we can be sure that the Assyrian kings systematically and resolutely strove to unify the multitudes of people ruled by them into a single nation. The very name of the country, "land of Aššur", connoted a kingdom of God set apart from the rest of the world. It originally was only a province around the city of Aššur, but it grew with the addition of new provinces. Every new province was turned into an integral part of the original "land of Aššur", and their peoples became regular Assyrian citizens (*mārē* or *nišē māt Aššūr*, or simply *Aššūrāyē*) with full civil rights and obligations.¹⁴ As Assyrians they had to pay

14. The formulaic phrase used in the royal inscriptions was *itti nišē māt Aššūr amnušunūti* "I counted them as citizens of Assyria." This phrase is already attested in the inscriptions of the Middle-Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I

regular taxes and do the required military and labour service; but in return, they got safety and prosperity, were equal before the law, and could appeal directly to the Great King in case of dire need (Postgate 1975). The king, who ruled as a chosen Son of God (Parpola 1997), was the bond that united the nation by virtue of his role as helper in distress. He was the rescuer of the weak and the destitute, the great healer, the sun of his people, the good shepherd that loved and protected his sheep and guided them to the right path (Parpola 2001; Annus 2002).

The long-term strategic goal of Assyria thus was not the creation of an empire upheld by arms, but a nation united by a semi-divine king perceived as the source of safety, peace and prosperity. As we have seen, this goal was achieved through a systematically implemented assimilation and integration policy geared to delete the ethnic identities of the conquered peoples and to replace them with an Assyrian one. The efficacy of this policy is strikingly demonstrated by the fate of the tens of thousands of Hurrians who were deported from their homeland and resettled in Assyria in the middle Assyrian period. A few centuries later, the descendants of these people had been so completely absorbed into the Assyrian society that no trace of their Hurrian ancestry, except for a few garbled personal names, remains in the Neo-Assyrian sources (Rollig 1996). They now were in every respect ethnic Assyrians, indistinguishable from their fellow citizens.

By the end of the seventh century BC, all provinces and dependencies of Assyria including the Levant had been Assyrian territory for more than a hundred years, most of them for hundreds of years (see Table I). Keeping in mind that ethnic identities in multiethnic societies universally start declining already in the second generation, it is absolutely unthinkable that the average Assyrian citizen living in the late seventh century could have regarded himself (or herself) as anything but Assyrian.¹⁵

His cultural milieu was pluralistic and often cosmopolitan but nonetheless thoroughly uniform and Assyrian wherever he went. Assyria was the only world he knew; any memory of the ethnic roots of his ancestors had long since faded out or become irrelevant as a result of mixed interethnic marriages in

(1114-1076), and later recurs in the inscriptions of Aššur-dan II (934-912), Shalmaneser III (858-824), and Šamši-Adad V (823-811), but until the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727) it only referred to people deported to Assyria, not to the inhabitants of newly established provinces collectively).

15. A telling example is the author of SAA 16 126-129, Itti-Šamaš-balātu, a loyal Assyrian official in Phoenicia under Assurbanipal. He writes in fluent Neo-Assyrian, but his name and several Babylonianisms in his language show that he was originally a Babylonian. He is almost certainly identical with the author of the Babylonian letter SAA 18 80

several generations. True, people in different parts of the country practiced different customs, dressed differently, spoke different local languages, and venerated different local gods; but all of them pledged allegiance to the same king, worshipped the same national gods, and spoke the same national language, Imperial Aramaic. This was not the language spoken by ethnic Arameans but a creation of the Empire, a *lingua franca* born from the interaction of numerous ethnic groups and therefore serving as a unifying rather than separating factor.

 TABLE I. *Provinces of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*

Name of province or equivalent*	Location in conventional terms	Province since at least (BC)	Time under Assyrian rule	
			in years	in generations
1. Aššur	Assyria	c. 2300	1500	50
2. Nīnuwa (Nineveh)	Assyria	c. 1360	750	25
3. Kilzi	Assyria	c.1330	720	24
4. Kalhu	Assyria	c.1310	700	23
5. Halahhu	Assyria	c.1310	700	23
6. Apku	Assyria	c.1310	700	23
7. Arbail (Arbela)	Assyria	c. 1310	700	23
8. Šibanība	Assyria	c. 1310	700	23
9. Šīmu	Assyria	c.1310	700	23
10. Talmūsa	Assyria	c. 1310	700	23
11. Habrūri	Assyria	c. 930 (already MA)	315	10.5
12. Arrapha (Kerkuk)	Assyria	c. 900 (already MA)	285	9.5
13. Dēru	Assyria	c. 900 (already MA)	285	9.5
14. Lahīru	Assyria	c. 900 (already MA)	285	9.5
15. Lubda	Assyria	c. 900 (already MA)	285	9.5
16. Katmuhi/Šahuppa	Assyria	c.900	290	9.5
17. Raqmatu	Syria	899	290	9.5
18. Našībina (Nisibin)	Assyria	896	285	9.5
19. Gūzāna / Hanigalbat	Syria	894	285	9.5
20. Tušhan/Nairi	Assyria	879 (already MA)	270	9
21. Sinābu	Assyria	879	270	9
22. Bīrāti	Assyria	879?	270	9
23. Til-Barsib/Tarbusībi	Syria	856	250	8.5
24. Meturna	Assyria	851	245	8.2
25. Rašappa	Syria	849	240	8
26. Nēmed-Issār	Syria	842	230	7.5
27. Arzūhina	Assyria	839 (already MA)	225	7.5
28. Kipšūna	Assyria	833	225	7.5
29. Isāna	Syria	830	220	7.5
30. Harrān	Syria	814	205	7
31. Hāurīna	Syria	810?	200	6.7
32. Māzamua/Lullumû	Assyria	810	200	6.7
33. Balāta	Assyria	c. 810	200	6.7
34. Halzu	Assyria	c. 810	200	6.7
35. Hindānu	Syria	803	195	6.5
36. Lāqê*	Syria	803 (already MA)	195	6.5
37. Sūhu*	Syria	803	195	6.5
38. Dūr-Issār	Syria	803?	195	6.5

(cf. obv. 5-7 and rev. 2-3 of this letter with SAA 16 126:19-20 and 127 r.15-16), and had thus started his career as "prelate" (šatammu) of Uruk under Esarhaddon.

Name of province or equivalent*	Location in conventional Terms	Province since at least (BC)	Time under Assyrian rule	
			in years	in generations
39. Āmidu/Bīt-Zamāni	Assyria	799	190	6.5
40. Tillê	Syria	792	180	6
41. Si'immê/Šibhiniš	Syria	791	180	6
42. Barhalza	Assyria	c.790?	180	6
43. Halzi-atbāri	Assyria	c.790?	180	6
44. Tamnūna	Assyria	785	175	6
45. Kurbail	Assyria	784	175	6
46. Nikkur/Parsua	Syromedia	744	130	4.5
47. Arpadda	Syria	743	135	4.5
48. Aššūr-iqīša/Ulluba	Assyria	739	130	4.5
49. Hatarikka	Syria	738	130	4.5
50. Kār-Adad	Syria	738	130	4.5
51. Kullanīa	Syria	738	130	4.5
52. Nuquđina	Syria	738	130	4.5
53. Šimirra	Syria	738	130	4.5
54. Tū'immu	Syria	738	130	4.5
55. Dū'ru (Dor)	Palestine	734	125	4
56. Gal'ad (Gilead)	Palestine	733	125	4
57. Magidū (Megiddo)	Palestine	733	125	4
58. Dimašqa (Damascus)	Syria	732	125	4
59. Maṣuāti (Masyat)	Syria	732	125	4
60. Šūpat (Zobah)	Syria	732	125	4
61. Haurāni	Syria	732	125	4
62. Qarnīna (Qarnaim)	Palestine	732	125	4
63. Sāmerīna (Samaria)	Palestine	722	110	3.7
64. Hamāt (Hamah)	Syria	720	110	3.7
65. Gargamīs (Carchemis)	Syria	717	110	3.7
66. Bīt-Hamban	Syromedia	716	100	3.5
67. Bīt-Kāri	Media	716?	100	3.5
68. Bīt-Singibuti	Media	716	100	3.5
69. Harhār/Kār-Šarrukin	Syromedia	716	100	3.5
70. Kišēsim/Kār-Nergal	Syromedia	716	100	3.5
71. Quwê (Coa)	Anatolia	713	105	3.5
72. Marqāsa (Mar'āš)	Anatolia	711	105	3.5
73. Melīdi (Melitēnē)	Anatolia	711	105	3.5
74. Sam'alla	Anatolia	711	105	3.5
75. Dūr-Abīhāra/Gambūlu	Babylonia	710	85	3
76. Dūr-Šarrukku	Babylonia	710	85	3
77. Šamaš-nāšir	Babylonia	710	85	3
78. Bābili /Akkad (Babylon)	Babylonia	710	105	3.5
79. Hatalla (Hatra?)	Assyria	c.710	90	3
80. Kummuhi	Anatolia	708	100	3.2
81. Dūr-Šarrukīn	Assyria	706	750	25
82. Kār-Sīn-ahhē-rība/Elenzas	Media	702	85	3
83. Dūr-Sīn-ahhē-rība/Alihu	?	c.700?	85	3
84. Māt Tāmti	Babylonia	680	55	2
85. Ūru (Ur)	Babylonia	680	55	2
86. Šīdūnu (Sidon)	Phoenicia	676	65	2.2
87. Kulimmeri	Armenia	674	65	2.2
88. Uppūmu (Fūm)	Armenia	674	65	2.2
89. Šurru (Tyre)	Phoenicia	671	60	2
90. Elam	Persia	645	15?	0.5

The common religion, culture, world-view and value system, and above all, the common unifying language (Aramaic) effectively set Assyria apart from the rest of the

world and created a feeling of unity and solidarity within the country (cf. Alba 1990, 17-18). The inherent notion of "us" against "all the others" that came with this dichotomy-Aramaic was effectively not spoken outside the Empire-agreed well with the dualistic ideology of the Empire, which saw Assyria as the kingdom of God commissioned to spread the light of civilization to the world surrounding it (Oded 1992).

The shaping of Assyria and its national identity has an obvious parallel in ancient Rome, which likewise expanded from a -city to a world empire. The analogy of Rome is instructive also in showing how deeply the national identity of the Empire could become rooted even in areas far removed from its original core. The Antonine constitution of AD 212, which granted full Roman citizenship to the entire Roman Empire, is generally recognised to have "promoted in both east and west a consciousness of being Roman that lasted until the fall of the Empire, and sometimes beyond it" (Honore 1996). Centuries after the collapse of the West Roman Empire, the Byzantines still identified themselves as *Rhōmaioi* and were known as Romans to all nations of the Near East (Kazhdan 1991, 1793 and 1809-1810).¹⁶

3. The Continuity of Assyrian Identity in Post-Empire Times

In this context it is important to draw attention to the fact that the Aramaic-speaking peoples of the Near East have since ancient times identified themselves as Assyrians and still continue to do so. The self-designations of modern Syriacs and Assyrians, *Sūryōyō*¹⁷ and *Sūrāyā*,¹⁸ are both derived from the ancient Assyrian word for "Assyrian", *Aššūrāyu*, as can be easily established from a closer look at the relevant words.

3.1 The Neo Assyrian Origin of Syriac and Modern Assyrian *Sūryōyō*/*Sūrāyā*

The word *Aššūrāyu* is an adjective derived from the geographical and divine name *Aššur* with the gentilic suffix *-āyu*. The name was originally pronounced [Aššūr], with a

16. It should be noted, however, that the average Syrian Monophysite was not so much moved by imperial doctrines and identity as by "his loyalty to own Church, his own bishop and the holy men of his neighbourhood" (Mango 1980, 30). In classical Syriac, *Rhūmōyō* continued to mean "Roman" or "Latin", and only rarely "a Greek, i.e. a citizen of the Eastern Roman Empire" (Payne Smith 1903, 531b). In modern literary Arabic, by contrast, *Rūmī* still means both "Roman" and "Byzantine".

17. "A Syrian, Palestinian" (Payne Smith 1903, 371 s.v.). Note that in classical Syriac, the toponym *Sūrīya* also covered Mesopotamia and Assyria (= *Sūrīya barōytō*, "Farther Syria", *ibid.* 370).

18. "This is the ordinary name by which the E. Syrians call themselves, though they also apply it to the W. Syrians or Jacobites" (Maclean 1901, 223).

palato-alveolar fricative, but owing to a sound shift, its pronunciation was turned to [Aθθūr] in the early second millennium BC.¹⁹ The common Aramaic word for Assyria, *Āθūr*, reflects this pronunciation and in all probability dates back to the twelfth century BC, when the Aramean tribes first came into contact with the Assyrians. Towards the end of the second millennium, another sound shift took place in Assyrian, turning the pronunciation of the name into [Assūr] (Parpola 1974; Fales 1986, 61-66). Since unstressed vowels were often dropped in Neo-Assyrian at the beginning of words (Hameen-Anttila 2000, 37), this name form later also had a shorter variant, *Sūr*, attested in alphabetic writings of personal names containing the element Aššur in late seventh century BC Aramaic documents from Assyria.²⁰ The word *Assūrāyu*, "Assyrian", thus also had a variant *Sūrāyu* in late Assyrian times.

This variant is hidden behind standard orthography in Assyrian cuneiform texts, but its existence is confirmed by the classical Greek words for Assyrians and Assyria, which display a corresponding variation between forms with initial A- (*Assúrios/Assuría*) and ones without it (*Súrios/Súros/Suría*; see Table II). The Greeks, who were in frequent contact with Assyria in the eighth and seventh centuries BC (Rollinger 2001), would not have borrowed the word without the initial A-, had the Assyrians themselves not omitted it, since omission of initial vowels is not a feature of classical Greek phonology.

TABLE II. Terms for "Assyria" and "Syria" in Greek and Roman literature (based on Noldeke 1871)

Author	Date	Meaning		
		Assyria(ns) ²¹	"Syria(ns)" ²²	Mesopotamia
Aeschylus	525-456 BC	Suría, Súrios		
Pindar	518-438 BC	Súrios		
Xanthus	fl. 450 BC	Suría, Súrios		
Herodotus	c. 480-420	Suríē, Súrioi (Asszirioi)		
Sophocles	496-406 BC	Súros		
Scylax	5th c. BC	Assuría		
Panyassis	5th c. BC	Assuría		

19. The shift [š] - [θ] was an internal Assyrian phonetic development leading to the merger of /š/ and /θ/, as evidenced by the use of a single set of cuneiform graphemes (ŠA, SI, ŠU) for both /š/ and /θ/ in Old Assyrian (Hecker 1968, § 40a). That the merger resulted in /θ/ not /š/ is proved by variant spellings like OA *I-ri-tim* (= [Iriθim]) for normal *I-ri-SI-im* (genitive of Irišum, Hecker 1968, § 40i), or MA *tī-ru* (= [θīru]) for *šīru "flesh" and *ut-ra-a-aq* for *ušrāq "he will thresh" (Mayer 1971, § 17), where /θ/ (< */š/) is rendered with graphemes normally used for writing the alveolar stop /t/ (and its fricative variant [θ]).

20. *srslmh* = Aššūr-šallim-ahi, KAI 234:2; *srsrd* = Aššūr-(a) šarēd, Y-41 236 r. 4; *srgnr* = Aššūr-gārū'a-nēre, *AECT* 58:4 (taking *srsrd* for a spelling of *Šarru-(a)šarēd is not possible, since the name in question is not attested in Neo-Assyrian). The dropping of the initial vowel in [Assūr] → [Sūr] has a perfect parallel in the Neo-Assyrian variants of the divine name Ištar ([Iššār] → [Šār], see Zadok 1984, 4; the short form [Šār] is already attested in the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, see PNA 2/1569 s.v. Issār-dūrī 4).

21. Including Babylonia and Cappadocia.

22. Corresponding to the Roman province of Syria.

Author	Date	Meaning		
		Assyria(ns) ²¹	"Syria(ns)" ²²	Mesopotamia
Ctesias	5th c. BC	<i>Assuria, Suria</i>		
Thucydides	c.455-400	<i>Suria</i>		
Xenophon	c.430-354	<i>Assuria</i>	<i>Suria</i>	<i>Suria</i>
Aristoxenus	c. 370 BC	<i>Súroi</i>		
Aristotle	384-322 BC	<i>Suria</i>		
Hecataeus	c.360-290	<i>Suria</i>		
Cleitarchus	c. 310 BC	<i>Suria</i>		
Callimachus	c. 280-245	<i>Assuria, Assúrioi</i>		
Apollonius Rhodius	3rd c. BC	<i>Assuria</i>		
Polybius	200-118 BC	<i>Suria</i>	<i>Suria</i>	
Meleager	fl. 100 BC	<i>Assuria, Súros</i>		
Cicero	106-43 BC	<i>Assyria/Syria</i>	<i>Asyria/Syria</i>	
Diodorus	c. 90-30 BC	<i>Súros</i>		
Catullus	c. 85-54 BC	<i>Assyria</i>	<i>Assyria</i>	
Virgil	70-19 BC	<i>Assyrius</i>		
Horace	65-8 BC	<i>Assyria</i>		
Strabo	64 BC-AD 21	<i>Assuria/Aturia (Suria)</i>	<i>Suria</i>	
Livy	59 BC-AD 12		<i>Syria</i>	
Ovid	43 BC-AD 17	<i>Assyria</i>		
Seneca	c. AD 1-65	<i>Assyria</i>		
Pomponius Mela	fl. AD 50	<i>Syria</i>		
Pliny the Elder	AD 23-79	<i>Syria, Assyria</i>		
Lucanus	AD 39-65	<i>Assyria</i>		
Josephus	AD 37-94	<i>Súroi</i>	<i>Súroi, Assúrioi</i>	
Cornutus	1st c. AD	<i>Assúrioi</i>		
Arrian	AD 86-160	<i>Assuria, Assúrioi</i>	<i>Suria koilē</i>	<i>Suria</i>
Curtius	c. AD 100	<i>Syria</i>		
Lucian	c. AD 120-180	<i>Assúrios</i>		
Apuleius	c. AD 125-170	<i>Assyria, Syria</i>		
Ptolemy	fl. 146-170	<i>Assuria</i>		
Achilles Tatius	fl. AD 150	<i>Assuria</i>		
Pausanias	fl. AD 150	<i>Súros</i>		
Tatian	fl. AD 172	<i>Assúrioi</i>		
Clement	c. AD 150-215	<i>Súros</i>		
Dio Cassius	AD 164-229+	<i>Aturia</i>		
Hippolytus	c.170-236	<i>Assyrii</i>		
Hyginus	2nd c. AD	<i>Syria</i>		
Oppian	2nd c. AD	<i>Assúrios, Súros</i>		
Justinus	3rd c. AD	<i>Syri (< Assyrii)</i>		
Philostratus	3rd. c. AD	<i>Assúrioi</i>		
Ammianus	AD 330-395	<i>Assyria</i>	<i>Assyria</i>	
Macrobius	fl. AD 430	<i>Assvrii</i>		
Nonnus	fl. 450-470	<i>Assúrios (Súiros)</i>		

Phonologically, Modern Assyrian *Sūrāyā* perfectly agrees with Neo-Assyrian *Sūrāyu*, while Syriac *Sūryōyō* displays an intrusive *yod*, which it shares with Greek *Súrios* and *Suria*. This intrusive *yod* surely is due to Greek influence, since in classical Syriac the word also occurs in the form *Sūrōyō*, in perfect agreement with the Modern Assyrian *Sūrāyā*.²³ It is worth noting that *Sūrāyā* is reported to have a variant with initial *A-*, but this is avoided in

23. Syriac /ō/ goes back to Old Aramaic /ā/.

careful speech, since it instinctively sounds incorrect in view of the classical Syriac *Sūryōyō* (Yildiz 1999, 24; Frye 1997).²⁴ Since omission of initial vowels is not a feature of Aramaic phonology, the lack of the initial *A-* in *Sūrāyā/Sūr(y) ōyō* cannot be due to internal Aramaic development but must go back directly to Neo-Assyrian.

The phonology of *Sūrāyā* (*Sūrōyō*) thus implies that this term, which is crucial to the identity of the present-day Aramaic-speaking peoples, entered the Aramaic language in the seventh century BC, when the Arameans already were a fully integrated part of the Assyrian nation. In contrast to the word *ĀṪūr*, which was borrowed into Aramaic when Assyria still was an alien society, it cannot be regarded as a loanword but as an *indigenous selfdesignation*, which the Aramaic-speaking Assyrians shared with their Akkadian-speaking fellow citizens.

3.2 The Continuity of Assyrian Culture under the Achaemenid Empire

With the fall of Nineveh, the Empire was split in two, the western half falling in the hands of a Chaldean dynasty, the eastern one in the hands of Median kings. In 539 BC, both became incorporated in the Achaemenid Empire, the western one as the megasatrapy of Assyria (*AṪūra*), the eastern one as the satrapy of Media (*Māda*) (Parpola 2000b, 4-5).

The political power of Assyria was gone, but its people, culture and religion lived on. The Achaemenids preferred not to interfere in the internal affairs of their satrapies as long as the flow of tribute and taxes continued undisturbed (Dandamayev and Lukonin 1989, 104). This was no problem in Assyria, whose population continued to venerate the Great King as the source of peace and security. The Aramaic *Sayings of Ahiqar*, a popular collection of wisdom composed in the Neo-Assyrian period, praised fear of God and King as the highest moral virtue; at the same time, being set at the Assyrian royal court, they continued to boost the Assyrian identity of the population (Dalley 2001; Parpola n.d.). The Achaemenids, who themselves were significantly Assyrianized (Dandamayev 1997; Parpola 2002), felt no need to change the existing realities (Eph'al 1978, 87). Thus everything went on just as before. Imperial Aramaic continued as the *lingua franca* of the Empire, the Aramaic script-now called the Assyrian script (Steiner 1993)-was the everyday writing system, local religion

24. According to Yildiz, writings of *Sūryōyō* and *Sūrāyā* are occasionally preceded by the vowel sign *alap* with a *linea occultans* above indicating that this *alap* is not to be pronounced

and cults were tolerated, and the judicial system, calendar and imperial standards imposed by the Assyrians remained in force everywhere (Eph'al 1988, 147-161; Grelot 1972).

The 210 years of Achaemenid rule thus helped preserve the Assyrian identity of the Aramaic-speaking peoples. Although the times of Assyrian hegemony were over, the satrapy of AĀūra kept Assyria on the map as a political entity and its inhabitants as Assyrians in the eyes of the contemporary world. Paradoxically, the period of massacres and persecutions following the fall of Nineveh seems to have strengthened their national and ethnic identity. The last king of Babylon, Nabonidus, who was of Assyrian extraction, reverted to Assyrian royal titlature and style in his inscriptions and openly promoted Assyrian religion and culture, evidently as a chauvinistic reaction against the Chaldean dynasty from which he had usurped power (Mayer 1998). No wonder the Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon remembered him as an Assyrian king.²⁵

3.3 Assyrian Identity in Hellenistic and Roman Times

Under the successors of Alexander the Great, Assyria became the power base of the Seleucid Empire,²⁶ which at its largest covered much the same area as the Assyrian Empire previously. Even though the Seleucid kings pursued an active policy of Hellenization and laid great stress on their Macedonian origins, they adopted the administrative methods of the Achaemenids and on the whole respected the local traditions; in due course, they inevitably began to assimilate to the local population. To the contemporaries, their kingdom was a continuation of the Assyrian Empire. It is called "Assyria" (*Ašūr*) in the Dead Sea Scrolls²⁷ and in the Babylonian Talmud (Steiner 1993), and "the kingdom of the Assyrians" (*Assuriōn basileía*) in the *Antiquities* of Josephus.²⁸

When the Seleucid Empire disintegrated at the end of the second century BC, its western remnants were annexed to Rome, while several semi-independent kingdoms of decidedly Assyrian identity (Osrhoene, Adiabene, Hatra, Assur) popped up in the east under Parthian overlordship. These kingdoms preserved Assyrian cultural and religious traditions (Al-Salihi, W. 1983; cf. Table III) but were also receptive to Christianity, whose central ideas were in line with the central tenets of Assyrian religion and ideology, and which was felt as intrinsically Assyrian because of the Aramaic affinity of Jesus and the disciples.

25. Herodotus 1.188.1; Xenophon, *Cyr.* 1.5.2, and *passim* (see Parpola 2003a, 343-344).

26. Cf. Livy XXXV 49.8 (citing Titus Flaminus), "The armies of Antiochus III [the Great, 222-187 BC] were all Syrians".

27. 1 QM 1:2 and 6 (The War Scroll).

The Roman West likewise preserved Assyrian traditions, and Assyrian religion persisted alongside Christianity in all its major cities until late Antiquity.

TABLE III. *Assyrian theophoric personal names from Parthian Assur, Hatra and Tūr `Abdīn* (Beyer1998)

Deity	Parthian period name	Meaning	Site	Year	NA equivalent
Addu	Addu-nūr	Addu is my light	Hatra		Addu-nūrī
Allāya	`Abd-Allāya	Servant of Allaya	Hatra		Urdu-Allāya
Allāt	Garam-Allāt	Allat decided	Hatra	AD 235	
	`Awīd-Allāt	Client of Allat	Hatra		Ubru-Allāti
	Tēm-Allāt	Slave of Allat	Hatra		Urdu-Allāti
Aššūr	Ahī-Assur	Aššūr is my brother	Assur	AD 221	Ahī-Aššūr
	Assur-ah-iddin	Aššūr gave a brother	Assur		Aššūr-ahu-iddin
	Assur-amar	Aššūr commanded	Assur		Aššūr-iqbi
	Assur-dayyān	Aššūr is (my) judge	Assur	AD 200	Aššūr-da'an
	Assur-hananī	Aššūr was merciful to me	Assur		Cf. Aššūr-rēmānni
	Assur-hēl	Aššūr is (my) strength	Assur		Emūqī- Aššūr
	Assur-šama`	Aššūr heard	Assur	AD 184	Išme- Aššūr
	Assur-`a ab	Aššūr protected	Assur	AD 221	Aššūr -iṣṣur
	Assur-natan	Aššūr gave	Assur	AD 184	Aššūr-iddin
	Assur-tariṣ	Aššūr is right	Assur	AD 200	Cf. Nabû-tariṣ
	`Aqīb-Assur	Protégé of Aššūr	Assur	AD 220	Kidin- Aššūr
	`Ēnī-`al-Assur	My eye is upon Aššūr	Assur		Ēnī- Aššūr
	Re'ūt-Assur	Grace of Aššūr	Assur, Takrit	AD 112	Rēmūt- Aššūr
Aššūr-Bēl	Assur-Bēl-dayyān	Aššūr-Bēl is (my) judge	Assur	AD 222	Aššūr-Bēl-da'an
Bēl	Bēl-abī	Bel is my father	Assur	AD 192	Bēl-abīa/abū'a
	Bēl-barak	Bel blessed	Hatra		Bēl-barakki
	Bēl-`aqab	Bel protected	Hatra	AD 97	Bēl-iṣṣur
	Malā-Bēl	Bel filled	Assur	AD 221	
	Sattar-Bēl	Bel covered	Tūr `Abdīn	AD 195	
	Šözib-Bēl	Save (me), Bel!	Hatra		Cf. Šözib-il
Issār	`Abed-Iššār	Servant of Ištar	Hatra		Urdu-Issār
	Natun-Iššār	Gift of Ištar	Hatra		Taddin-Issār
	`Awīd-Iššār	Client of Ištar	Ġaddala	AD 141	Ubru-Issār
Nabû	Ba-Nabû-ehdet	I adhere to Nabû	Assur	AD 112	Ana-Nabû-taklāk
	Bar-Nabû	Son of Nabû	Hatra		Cf. Mār-Aššūr/Issār
	Nabû-banā	Nabû created	Hatra		Nabû-ibni
	Nabû-dayyān	Nabû is (my) judge	Assur, Hatra	AD 188	Nabû-dayyān
	Nabû-yāb	Nabû gave	Hatra		Nabû-iddin
	Nabû-gabbār	Nabû is strong	Hatra		Nabû-dān
	Nabû-kātōb	Nabû is scribe	Hatra	AD 235	
	Nabû-`aqab	Nabû protected	Assur		Nabû-iṣṣur
	`Abed-Nabû	Servant of Nabû	Tūr `Abdīn	AD 195	Urdu-Nabû
Nanāia	Bar-Nanāya	Son of Nanaya	Hatra, Tūr `A.	AD 195	Ban-Nanāya
Nērgal	Bar-Nērgol	Son of Nergal	Hatra	AD 108	
	Nērgol-dammar	Nergal amazed	Tūr `Abdīn	AD 195	
	`Abed-Nērgol	Servant of Nergal	Hatra		Urdu-Nērgal
Salmānu	`Abed-Šalmā(n)	Servant of Salman	Hatra	AD 235	
Šamaš	`Aqab-Šameš	Šameš protected	Hatra, Tūr `A.	AD 217	Cf. Sē-aqaba
	Han-Šameš	Šameš was merciful	Hatra		Cf. Hana-Sē
	Ilāh-Šameš	(My) god is Šameš	Hatra		Samsi-ilāī

28. "170 years of the kingdom of the Assyrians, which was after Seleucus, who was called Nicator, got the dominion over Syria", Ant. 13.6.6.

Deity	Parthian period name	Meaning	Site	Year	NA equivalent
	Meqīm-Šameš	Šameš is establisher	Hatra		Mušallim- Šamaš
	Natūn-Šameš	Gift of Šameš	Ṭūr `Abdīn	AD 195	
	Rapā-Šameš	Šameš healed	Hatra		Cf. Sē-rapā
	Šamšāy	Belonging to Šameš	Hatra		Šamšāya
	Šameš-`aqab	Šameš protected	Hatra	AD 205	Cf. Sē-aqaba
	Šameš-barak	Šameš blessed	Hatra	AD 237	Cf. Sē-barakka
	Šameš-yāb	Šameš gave	Hatra. Ṭūr `A.	AD 162	Samsi-yābi
	Šameš-zabad	Šameš bestowed	Hatra, Ṭūr `A.	AD 128	
Serua	Ba-Serū	(I adhere) to Šerua	Assur	AD 217	
	Serū-mallī	Šerua fulfilled	Assur		

In the second century AD, two prominent writers from Roman Syria, Lucian and Tatian, ostentatiously identify themselves as Assyrians (*Assúrios*). This self-identification is commonly misinterpreted to imply nothing more than that these writers were ethnic Syrians (in the modern sense) speaking Aramaic as their mother tongue (Millar 1993, 460). It is perfectly clear from the contexts, however, that they were specifically referring to their native identity and cultural heritage, which they proudly and defiantly contrasted with the Greek culture.²⁹ That heritage was Assyrian. It is worth emphasizing that while *Assúrios* in Roman times could refer to an inhabitant of the Roman province of Syria, it basically meant "Assyrian", nothing else. No "Syria" in the modern sense existed in antiquity. In Armenian, Parthian and Egyptian sources of the Roman period, Roman Syria is consistently and unmistakably referred to as "Assyria" (*Asorik'*, 'swry'; 'Išr; see Frye 1992; Steiner 1993).

4. The Assyrian Identity Today

From the third century AD on, the Assyrians embraced Christianity in increasing numbers, even though the Assyrian religion persisted in places like Harran at least until the tenth, in Mardin even until the 18th century AD (Chwolsohn 1856, 151-156). The single-minded adherence to the Christian faith from late antiquity until the present time has made Christianity an indelible part of Assyrian identity, but it has also subjected the Assyrians to endless persecutions and massacres, first in the hands of the Romans, then in the hands of the Sasanian Persians, and last in the hands of Arabs, Kurds and Turks. These persecutions and massacres have reduced the total number of Assyrians from an estimated 20 million or more in antiquity to well under two million today.

29. Note Hall 1999, 38: "The fundamental (even primordial) motive of self-preservation will ... ensure that individuals will come fully to the *defense* of the collective identity that they see as fundamentally constitutive of their selves, when they feel that collective identity to be endangered" (my emphasis).

They have decimated the Assyrian nation, but they have also helped it survive through the millennia. While innumerable Assyrians have been forced to change identity in order to survive, others have rather chosen martyrdom than denied their Assyrian identity and faith. Hagiographic sources such as the Syriac *Acta Martyrum* show that the Assyrians of the Parthian period took pride in their glorious past, many nobles tracing their ancestry to the Assyrian royal house (Crone and Cook 1977, 55-56 and 189-193; Novak and Younansardaroud 2002). The Nestorian church of the seventh century AD, which had cloisters and bishoprics all over the ancient homeland, including Nineveh in the eparchy of Atur, chauvinistically asserted its Assyrian identity (Vööbus 1970, 94-101, 333; Gewargis 2002, 81-85).

Today, the Assyrian nation largely lives in diaspora, split into rivaling churches and political factions. The fortunes of the people that constitute it have gone different ways over the millennia, and their identities have changed accordingly. The Syriacs in the west have absorbed many influences from the Greeks, while the Assyrians in the east have since ancient times been under Iranian cultural influence. Ironically, as members of the Chaldean Catholic Church (established in 1553 but effectively only in 1830), many modern Assyrians originating from central Assyria now identify with "Chaldeans", a term associated with the Syriac language in the 16th century but ultimately derived from the name of the dynasty that destroyed Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire!

Disunited, dispersed in exile, and as dwindling minorities without full civil rights in their homelands, the Assyrians of today are in grave danger of total assimilation and extinction (Aprim 2003). In order to survive as a nation, they must now unite under the Assyrian identity of their ancestors. It is the only identity that can help them to transcend the differences between them, speak with one voice again, catch the attention of the world, and regain their place among the nations.

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